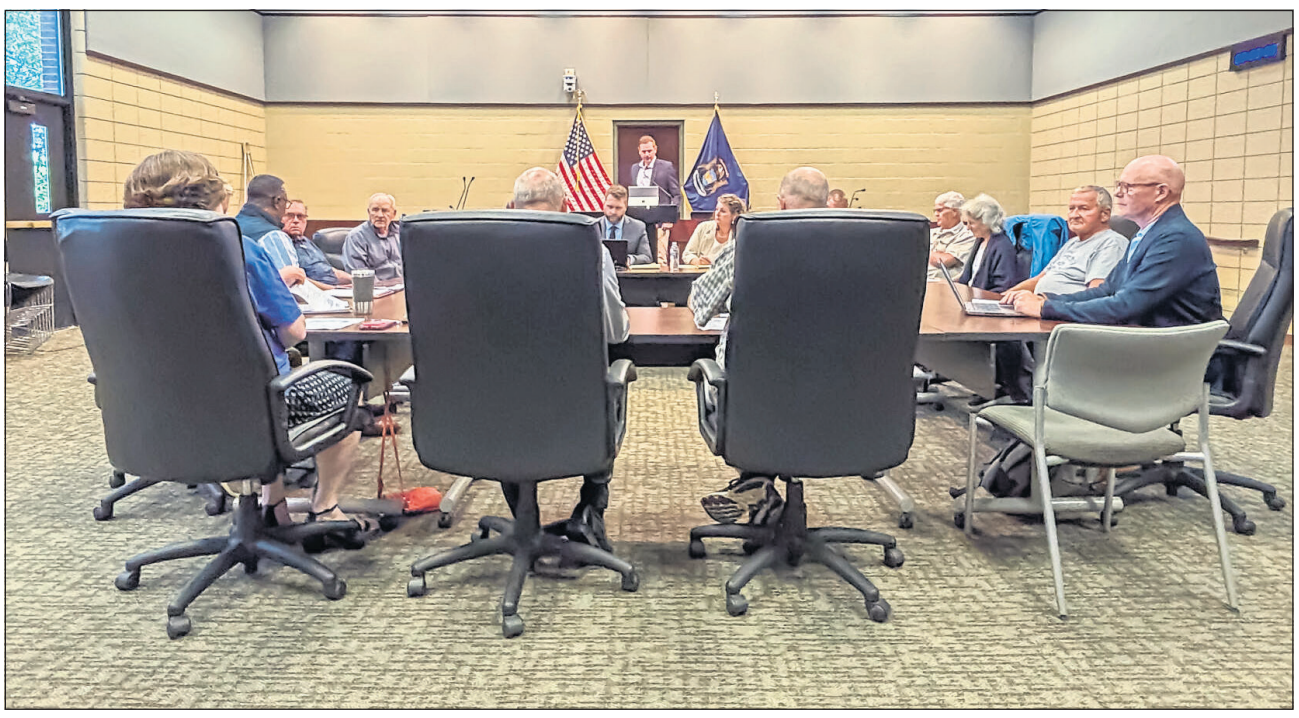
South Haven Tribune

$3

June 28, 2026



Photos by Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

South Haven City Council and city staff discuss a variety of topics during the Committee of a Whole meeting on June 1 in South Haven chambers.

A detailed approach

Breakout sessions helping SH council navigate tough topics

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

City council members, including Tom Capps, Jeff Arnold and Eddie Polk and City Manager Kate Hosier, along with city staff, meet once month in the Committee of a Whole meeting to discuss important topics in depth.

SOUTH HAVEN — In an effort to cut down on lengthy city council meetings, South Haven officials this year introduced a monthly Committee of the Whole session to allow for a deeper discussion of city issues before votes are considered.

Created in response to complaints about lengthy council meetings, the sessions have become a forum for discussing everything from short-term rentals and lifeguards to rising energy costs.

"Committee of the Whole is a separate meeting of the city council," City Manager Kate Hosier said this week. "It's a meeting where members of a board or council or commission can get together to discuss and debate and review municipal issues in depth, typically, without taking any official action or vote. This is widely used around the state."

While new to South Haven, the creation of the committee meeting stemmed from several residents saying they thought the regular city council meetings lasted too long.

"The last council with Letitia Wilkins and I, were guaranteed to come back – because we run staggered

See **COMMITTEE**, page A2

Aric Nesbitt drops bid for Michigan governor after Trump decision

By CRAIG MAUGER
The Detroit News (TNS)

LANSING, Mich. — Michigan Senate Minority Leader Aric Nesbitt suspended his campaign to be the state's next governor Monday, less than three hours after President Donald Trump announced he was endorsing fellow Republican U.S. Rep. John James for the job.

Nesbitt of Porter Township had been portraying himself as a vocal supporter of Trump, with his team distributing materials that said the president was " right about everything."

"This campaign has always been about the people of Michigan and standing with President Trump to defeat the Democrats in November," Nesbitt wrote on X. "Today, I am suspending my campaign and proudly joining President Trump in endorsing John James as Michigan's next governor."

Nesbitt's exit leaves James of Shelby Township, former Attorney General Mike Cox of Livonia and businessman Perry Johnson of Bloomfield Hills as the three GOP candidates still actively seeking their party's nomination in the Aug. 4 primary.

Both Cox and Johnson vowed to fight on Monday despite Trump's endorsement of James, who has previously run for the U.S. Senate in Michigan twice unsuccessfully.

Nesbitt had consistently been in fourth place behind the other three contenders in public polling.

His name will still appear on the ballot in August.

Michigan's current governor, Democrat Gretchen Whitmer, can't seek reelection because of term limits.

Katy Kildee / The Detroit News / TNS

State Sen. Minority Leader Aric Nesbitt, R-Porter Township, works in the Senate chamber on Dec. 19, 2024, at the Michigan State Capitol in Lansing.

The Senate minority leader launched his bid for the position in January 2025.

He previously served three terms in the state House, where he worked heavily on energy policy, and is now in his second and final term in the Senate. During Republican former Gov.

See **NESBITT**, page A2

South Haven schools to enact staffing changes

School board approves final budget amendments

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — Several students, parents and staff members expressed their concerns at Wednesday's South Haven school board meeting about ongoing staff changes in the district.

The changes are being made to the success coach positions, where several positions are being reduced in the next school year.

"I heard a rumor that all success coach positions will be eliminated throughout all buildings in 2027," South Haven resident Tiffany Cook said. "Success coaches are much more than another adult in the building; they are trusted mentors to help students navigate challenges. Whether a student is struggling academically, dealing with attendance issues, facing personal obstacles ... they are there to provide encouragement, guidance and accountability."

Superintendent Ana Aleman-Putman said the success coach positions were created during the pandemic as temporary positions.

"I wasn't here at the time and it was made clear to all the success coaches that when the funding ran out, that the positions are probably (going to) no longer exist," Aleman-Putman said. "However, after COVID it was able to be sustained."

Now, due to the budget being tighter, many of the success coach positions are being reduced, but not all will be eliminated.

"At the high school we are reducing some, however, they were offered the option to go to a different school in a different position," Aleman-Putman said. "Unfortunately, some of the budget reductions did force us to have to do that."

Budget amendments

The board approved the final budget amendments to the 2025-26 and the 2026-27 budgets during Wednesday's meeting.

Some of the amendments

See **SCHOOL**, page A2

LMC names Mason as provost

Former dean has interim tag removed for permanent title

By TRIBUNE STAFF

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Lake Michigan College has appointed Dr. LaToya Mason as its permanent provost.

Mason brings more than 13 years of leadership experience in higher education administration to the role, having most recently served as dean of Health Sciences Education and interim provost at the college.

Mason has been a cornerstone of Lake Michigan College since 2013, building a distinguished record of academic innovation, program development, and institutional advancement. As dean of Health Sciences Education, she provided strategic and operational oversight of nine academic programs, secured millions in grant funding, and led multiple programs to maximum accreditation status including the Diagnostic Medical Sonography, Medical Assisting and Radiologic Technology programs.

"Dr. Mason exemplifies the kind of transformational leadership that Lake Michigan College needs to move forward," LMC President Ken Flowers said in a news release. "Her deep commitment to student success and academic excellence makes her ideally suited to serve our college community in this capacity."

Among her most notable accomplishments, Mason secured a $600,000 grant to expand Health Science program offerings, leading to the development of a Physical Therapist Assistant program and lab at the college's South Haven campus. She also partnered with Siena Heights University on a $1 million State of Michigan grant to fund BSN education, resulting in 35 new registered nurses entering the regional health care workforce.

According to the release, Mason has also created successful apprenticeship pathways in health care through partnerships with MiWorks and Corewell Health South.

Mason holds a Ph.D. in education from Capella University, a master's of business administration in human resource management, and a master's of health administration from the University of Phoenix. She is a Michigan Community College Association Fellow, a member of Kappa

See **MASON**, page A2

The Tribune: Celebrating Our 127th Year

6 94653 00027 4

Economy expanded at solid 2.1 percent pace in 1st quarter, government says

By PAUL WISEMAN
AP Economics Writer

Nam Y. Huh / AP

Customers wait their orders in a food court at a wholesale store in Mount Prospect, Ill., Monday, June 8.

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy expanded at a solid and unexpected 2.1 percent annual pace from January through March, the Commerce Department reported Thursday in its final estimate of first-quarter growth.

The growth in gross domestic product – the nation's output of goods and services – marked a rebound from a sluggish 0.5 percent in the last three months of 2025 when a 43-day federal government shutdown weighed on the economy. Thursday's numbers were an upgrade from of Commerce's previous first-quarter estimate of 1.6 percent growth.

Business investment surged, probably reflecting an investment boom in artificial intelligence. But consumer spending, which accounts for around 70 percent of U.S. economic activity, fell sharply from fourth-quarter 2025 and from Commerce's previous estimate in a sign that consumers may be cutting back in the face of higher gasoline prices caused by the war with Iran.

"It was unsettling to see consumer spending revised even lower," Heather Long, chief economist at Navy Federal Credit Union, said in a commentary. "Spending is likely to tick up in (the second quarter), but it's worth watching carefully ... It's been a tough few months for American consumers, but most have been able to make it through. The question is how much relief is coming" as the U.S. and Iran continue talks toward a resolution of the conflict.

Excluding housing, private investment jumped 10.6 percent, up from 2.4 percent in fourth-quarter 2025. In a sign of the AI boom, investment in information-processing equipment jumped at a 39.9 percent pace as companies scrambled to outfit their data centers. But Michael Reid, head of U.S. economics at RBC Capital Markets, said before Thursday's report came out that "unfortunately, it's not a sustainable path." He expects data center investment to lose momentum going forward.

Residential investment, weighed down by high interest rates, dropped 7.8 percent from January through March, biggest fall since late 2022 and the fifth straight quarterly decline.

The federal government's spending and investment rose at a 9.4 percent clip in the first quarter after dropping 16.6 percent in October-December 2025 largely because of the government shutdown.

Imports, which are subtracted from GDP, grew at a slower pace than last estimated from January through March. They still subtracted 1.49 percentage points from first-quarter growth, but that was down from a 2.59 percentage-point hit in the previous estimate and was a major factor in Thursday's upgrade.

The U.S. economy – the world's biggest – has continued to chug along despite the Iran energy shock. The American job market has proven especially resilient. Employers added an average 188,000 jobs a month from March through May after adding fewer than 10,000 a month in 2025 amid uncertainty over President Donald Trump's trade and immigration policies.

Thursday's report was the Commerce Department's third and final estimate of first-quarter GDP growth. The first look at second-quarter economic growth is due July 30.

OBITUARY

James 'Jim' Hopkins

June 10, 1934 – June 18, 2026

Mr. James N. Hopkins, age 92, passed away peacefully on Thursday, June 18, 2026 in South Haven, Mich. He was born in Flint, Mich. on June 10, 1934.

Jim lived in Saginaw, Mich. until he married the former Ann E. Priest. The two then moved to South Haven.

Jim could build or repair anything and everything. He even built and flew his own plane. Jim and Ann volunteered at Al-Van Humane Society where he became the repairman for any broken items donated to the thrift store.

A good friend said, "Jim is one of the best guys I have ever known and truly a self-made man." He came up the "hard way," caring for his troubled family when he was just a young boy.

Jim's adopted family and beloved cats will miss him so much, but are so grateful to have known and loved him.

Per Jim's wishes, a memorial service will be held at a later date. Arrangements entrusted to The Filbrandt Chapel, 1076 S. Bailey Ave, South Haven, MI 49090.

Please feel free to share a memory on Jim's online guestbook at www.starksfh.com.

SCHOOL

From page A1

included changes to the food service fund, special revenue student/school activity funds, debt retirement funds and general fund.

Finance Administrator Nancy Nelson said they will end the year with a $26 million deficit in the budget.

The totals in the 2025-26 budget included $26,034,312 in revenue, $26,058,135 in expenses and $323,823 in net chance in fund balance.

The proposed 2026-27 budget amendments included $26,104,285 in total revenue, $26,629,119 in total expenses with a net change in fund balance of $524,834.

Other items

The board approved the purchase of the K-12 ELA curriculum and the 6-8 math curriculum.

The board approved the general fund transfer of up to $300,000 to the curriculum and program support fund.

High school science teacher Allison Boyd was approved for hire during Wednesday's board meeting.

The board approved the 2026-27 MHSAA membership.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

COMMITTEE

From page A1

terms and Annie Brown was up for reelection – but the three of us were talking and we recognize, our meetings are just going way too long, that this is taking forever," City Council Member Jeff Arnold said. "So we sense that, and then when the new candidates, (Dave) Flack and (Tom) Capps and (Eddie) Polk were out going door to door ... and people kept saying your meetings go so long. The voters were like, we want to be informed, we want to know what's going on, but we also got to work on Tuesday morning and your meetings are so long."

When the new city council members were seated, the council held a training session with the Michigan Municipal League. During training, city leaders discussed this issue of long meetings and the league recommended a Committee of the Whole to help solve that issue.

"I think, at any business, or my experiences is through the public schools, that even the school board will have a finance committee or a personnel committee and so, committees are nothing new," Arnold said. "But they said, well, Committee of a Whole, that's where you could study things and, more importantly I think for us, that's when we could discuss the issues at length, instead of dragging out a lot of stuff in front of all the voters. I think that's how the COWs started."

Arnold said the goals of the meeting are for training sessions and as informational meetings, where council members can ask questions about certain topics.

"Previous COWs have been more for our own information, like council members have questions about something; it could be a big issue, like short-term rentals or lifeguards. (It) could be little issues like at the road millage," Arnold said. "Kate makes sure to have the experts on hand ... and they can be there to answer questions as needed."

Hosier said the committee meetings are a great vehicle for the city council members to talk about important topics in detail.

"There's things that have to happen at certain times of the year, such as our budget process, and we have separate workshops for those to go into the details, but there hasn't really been a mechanism outside of special meetings to really dive into certain topics," Hosier said. "But I do think that the Committee of a Whole, because we do it only once a month, and right before their regular meeting, it has been a way for us to discuss topics that are somewhat complex and need a little bit more time to chew on."

Giving guidance

At the last committee meeting, representatives from the city's Board of Public Works discussed the rising energy costs.

"(At the last meeting) energy prices on the rise, something to consider is a behind the meter power source to help our voters save a little money, so what did that mean?" Arnold said. "We learned about batteries or natural gas and something we could explore and it was first, here's the problem, prices going through the roof and then here's an idea, do you want us to proceed? We say, 'Yeah, please proceed.'"

Arnold serves as the chair of the committee and as the mayor pro-tem for the city council.

"I'm also the mayor pro-tem – which is Latin for temporary – and I did it two years with (former Mayor) Scott Smith, and now (Mayor) Annie (Brown) chose me too during her second term," Arnold said. "The role of the pro-tem is simply just to run city council meetings if the mayor can attend it."

Arnold said having him lead the committee meetings was a way to lighten the mayor's workload.

"The idea of the COW, and we're going to do them on the same night (as the council meetings) and the mayor has to prepare for the council meeting," Arnold said. "So, let's try and take something off the mayor's plate and let's have the pro-tem do it.

During the committee meetings, council members can ask questions. However, Hosier said no action or votes are taken during the meetings and the topics discussed are not put on the agenda for the regular city council meeting that takes place afterward.

"What they tend to do is give guidance to staff as to which way, which direction to move, but it's not official action," Hosier said.

The meetings are open to the public and include a public comment time, but it is not broadcast or recorded like the regular city council meetings.

"I should reiterate that Committee of the Whole is still a meeting of the city council, so it's a public meeting. The public is welcome to attend," Hosier reiterated. "It's really a working session for council, so they're not taking final action at those meetings. But I do think this has been very helpful for them."

Arnold said he thinks the committee meetings have been working well for council members.

"I think it's good, I think it's working fine," he said. "I think we're getting our questions answered and it has sped up our council meetings, because we're not asking the oddball questions or getting off track."

The next Committee of a Whole meeting is scheduled to take place at 5:30 p.m. on July 6 at South Haven City Hall.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

MASON

From page A1

Delta Pi International Honor Society in Education, and an active contributor to numerous college and community committees.

"I am honored to serve Lake Michigan College in this role," Mason said in the release. "Our students, faculty and the communities we serve deserve the very best, and I am committed to leading with purpose, integrity and a deep dedication to excellence and belonging."

NESBITT

From page A1

Rick Snyder's administration, Nesbitt was briefly the state's lottery commissioner.

Nesbitt grew up on a six-generation family farm in southwest Michigan's Van Buren County and earned an economics degree from Hillsdale College, according to his official Michigan Senate biography.

In his statement Monday, Nesbitt called on Republicans to unite behind James.

"I'm asking every one of you who supported this campaign to stand with me behind John James, roll up our sleeves and deliver a Republican victory in November," Nesbitt wrote.

Former state House Speaker Tom Leonard, another Republican former candidate for governor, also endorsed James after ending his bid.

Al-Van Humane Society
Adopt ♥ Volunteer ♥ Donate ♥ Advocate
73303 8th Ave. PO Box 421 South Haven, MI 49090
phone 269.637.5062 fax 269.639.2242
Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pets of the Week, Luka!

Luka is a stunning 2-year-old Husky with movie-star looks and a personality to match. This friendly boy loves being around people and is happiest when he gets to stay close to his favorite humans. Like any good Husky, Luka isn't afraid to share his opinions. Whether he's chatting about his day or offering his thoughts completely unprompted, he makes sure life stays interesting. Submit an adoption survey at al-van.org/adopt!

Furry 5K
This weekend is your chance to hit the trail with your favorite four-legged sidekick!

Join us for Al-Van Humane Society's Furry 5K & 1-Mile Walk on June 27th and enjoy a morning of fresh air, wagging tails, and community while supporting the animals in our care. Bring your dog along for the fun or gather your family and friends for a scenic walk or run along the beautiful Van Buren Trail. Whether you're racing for a personal best or stopping every five minutes for sniff breaks (we support both approaches), there's a place for you. Registration is still open! Sign up today at al-van.org/furry5k

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST
Purina Dry Cat Food, Non-Clumping Cat Litter, and Poop Bags

STEWART & COMPANY
FINE FURNITURE & INTERIOR DESIGN
INDEPENDENCE DAY
SALE
40% OFF
AUTHORIZED STICKLEY DEALER
472 W. Michigan Avenue - Downtown Kalamazoo
269.343.4689
M-F 9:00am - 6:00pm Sat 9:00am - 5:00pm
www.stewartandcompanyfurniture.com
FINE FURNITURE • INTERIOR DESIGN • SINCE 1941

SAVE ON STICKLEY FURNITURE

Photos provided / Tom Renner

The South Haven Rotary Club will host a pancake breakfast on July 5 in the Pavilion downtown South Haven.

South Haven Rotary Club to host pancake breakfast

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven Rotarians will put an exclamation point on the Independence Day weekend by hosting a special pancake breakfast on July 5.

According to a news release, the all-you-can-eat breakfast will be served at the South Haven downtown Pavilion from 7:30 a.m. to noon.

"Proceeds from the breakfast will help Rotarians support community projects," the release stated. "Last year the Rotarians contributed over $50,000 to the needs of the community and region."

The cost will be $12 for adults and $5 for children five to 10. Children under five are free.

The proceeds from the annual pancake breakfast hosted by the South Haven Rotary club help support community projects.

This will be the first of two pancake breakfasts sponsored this summer by South Haven Rotary. The second will be the annual flyin' breakfast at the South Haven Regional Airport in conjunction with the National Blueberry Festival on Aug. 9.

South Haven rotary club honors members during annual dinner

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The Rotary Club of South Haven recently broke with tradition by recognizing co-Rotarians of the Year, LaRae Odland and Mary Sue Lyon, during their annual awards night and officer induction.

LYON

ODLAND

According to a news release, Odland and Lyon were recognized for their leadership in managing the Blessings in a Backpack community initiative.

Lyon served as president of the South Haven Rotary in 2021 and 2022, served as president of the South Haven Theater Series and as a board member for We Care.

"Mary Sue served as President of the South Haven Rotary in 2021-2022 and was instrumental in strengthening our governance processes and leadership capacity," the release stated.

Odland served in a key role for the Speakers Series of South Haven from its very start until 2024 and continues to serve as a council member for Peace Lutheran Church. She also led the Dykman Draw Bridge Flower Project for 10 years and raised significant funds for SHOUT projects throughout South Haven.

"During Rotary's annual pancake breakfasts, LaRae is always present to make sure the tables are set up exactly right, spaced comfortably and kept spotless during the event," the release stated. "Rotary of South Haven is fortunate to have LaRae and Mary Sue as members."

Photo provided / Tom Renner

President-elect Bob Menken (left), Mary Sue Lyon (middle left), LaRae Odland (middle right) and current President Amy Nichols (right) received awards during the Rotary Club's annual dinner.

Scott Reinert received the Community Service Award, a recognition given annually to a resident who makes a difference in the community while embodying the spirit of Service Above Self.

REINERT

CONRAD

METZEN

FLACK

"Scott has been a significant force behind the planning and development of an incredible portfolio of recreational opportunities that have been introduced and completed in South Haven Township," the release stated. "He is a visionary who sees possibilities and pursues the development of projects that serve to fill a void that make our community a better place to live, work and engage in outdoor recreation."

In collaboration with the South Haven Public Schools Foundation, the South Haven Rotary Club recognizes a local teacher or educator who exemplifies excellence in teaching and outstanding volunteer service beyond the classroom. This year's recipient is Josh Conrad, the food service director for South Haven Public Schools.

Bob Metzen was inducted as president of the Rotary Club of South Haven during the event.

"You may have seen Bob on the drawbridge tending to the beautiful flowers he and his wife Connie take care of daily," the release stated. "Bob is an amazing Rotarian who volunteers throughout the South Haven area."

Metzen is a Summa Cum Laude graduate of Loyola University, held positions at Price Waterhouse, Morton Thiokol and Harbor Capital. He retired in 2022 after serving as President and CEO of LaSalle Solutions. Metzen is an avid sailor and enjoys biking and golf.

Dave Flack will serve as vice president-president elect for the 2025-2026 Rotary year. A Michigan State graduate, Dave retired in 2024 as a director at Ford Motor Company. He is an elected member of South Haven City Council and most recently played a key role in developing the Riverwoods Dog Park.

LMC trustees set 2027 fiscal year budget

By TRIBUNE STAFF

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Lake Michigan College trustees have approved the general operating fund budget for fiscal year 2027, reflecting a 1.86 percent increase in total spending over the prior year.

According to a news release, the budget is designed to support student access and institutional quality while maintaining a commitment to sound financial stewardship.

"LMC has always been a careful steward of public dollars," LMC President Ken Flowers said in the release. "With budget negotiations still unresolved in Lansing and economic uncertainty at both the state and national level, this spending blueprint reflects the cautious, deliberate planning our students and community deserve."

The budget is prepared on an accrual basis of accounting, consistent with the college's audited year-end financial statements. Flowers said the budget projects a net result surplus ratio of 0.03 percent, in line with the college's goal of maintaining a small annual surplus to weather unexpected downturns and fund strategic opportunities.

Tuition and fees reflect an approximate 3 percent rate increase for academic year 2026-27. Traditional enrollment billing hours are budgeted flat due to ongoing demographic trends in the region, while LMC Middle College and Direct Credit hours are projected to grow 1.5 percent as a result of expanded early college outreach.

According to the news release, the college plans to award more than $699,000 in foundation scholarships to more than 100 students.

"LMC has achieved three consecutive years of enrollment growth among traditional students, which is a remarkable accomplishment given the declining demographics across our region. Building on that momentum, the college is increasingly focused on expanding access for adult and non-traditional students, ensuring LMC remains a vital resource for learners at every stage of life," LMC Board Chair John Grover said in the release.

State appropriations are budgeted about 2 percent above fiscal year 2026 actual revenues, pending final approval of Michigan's state budget.

At 68 percent of total expenditures, LMC's personnel costs reflect wages and employee benefits packages. College officials said wage increases this year are guided by the federal cost-of-living adjustment and findings from a pay equity study completed in 2026.

"LMC's comprehensive benefits are a meaningful part of employee compensation and a demonstration of the college's ongoing investment in its workforce," the release stated.

Capital investment and debt payments account for 9 percent of expenditures and include $800,000 for routine capital projects, $1.5 million for major capital projects, and $1,198,000 for debt principal and interest. The college's total debt as of June 30, reflects ongoing investment in campus infrastructure.

Provided photo

The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed CBK Construction as a new chamber member with a special ribbon cutting ceremony.

South Haven welcomes CBK construction

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed CBK Construction as a new chamber member with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

According to a news release, CBK Construction is a family-owned and operated general contractor based in Southwest Michigan.

CBK Construction specializes in pre-engineered metal buildings, steel erection, electrical services, facility maintenance, renovations, additions and design-build construction solutions.

The company has 40 years of combined industry experience and is known for delivering dependable service and quality craftsmanship across commercial and industrial projects.

"What sets CBK Construction apart is their self-performing approach, completing a majority of work in-house – including steel erection, electrical, and concrete services," the release stated. "With the ability to manage multiple trades under one roof it allows the team to maintain strong control over quality, cost, scheduling and project efficiency while providing tailored solutions to meet each client's needs."

CBK Construction serves as a general contractor, subcontractor, or direct-to-owner partner, supporting projects ranging from new builds to renovations and facility upgrades.

"Their team emphasizes collaboration, safety, and long-term relationships with clients throughout the region," the release stated.

To learn more about CBK Construction and their services go to cbkconstruction.us or call 269-266-3877.

South Haven Tribune

CLASSIFIEDS

Classified Desk: 1-855-317-4292

Hours: Monday - Friday 9am-2pm EST

0100 ANNOUNCEMENTS

WE BUY JUNK CARS!
DAMAGED? TOTALED?
BROKEN? NOT RUNNING?
WRECKED?

CALL 269-500-1711

0200 EMPLOYMENT

The City of South Haven is seeking a **Technical Support Administrator** to provide help desk support and assist with maintaining municipal IT systems, networks, and servers.
Associate's degree in IT, Computer Science, or related field required (Bachelor's preferred), with 1–3 years of relevant experience. Municipal or enterprise IT experience preferred.
Candidates may apply online at www.southhavenmi.gov. The City of South Haven is an Equal Opportunity Employer who places a high value on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

0500 MERCHANDISE

55" Husqvarna Zero turn lawn mower with grass catcher
Call 269-764-1650

WE BUY
RIDING & COMMERCIAL MOWERS, TRACTORS, ATVS, GOLF CARTS, SCOOTERS, 4X4S, VEHICLES & ALL LAWN EQUIPMENT.

269-500-1711

MOTORCYCLES & SNOWMOBILES WANTED
$$ CASH PAID $$
ALL MAKES AND MODELS

269-500-1711

0900 LEGALS

TRANSFER STATION – SOUTH HAVEN – GENEVA WILL BE CLOSED SAT, JULY 4, 2026 Geneva/South Haven Townships

Buy It. Sell It. Find It. CLASSIFIED.

COVERT TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

TO: THE RESIDENTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS OF COVERT TOWNSHIP, VAN BUREN COUNTY, MICHIGAN, AND ANY OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that a public hearing will be held by the Covert Township Planning Commission on July 15, 2026, at 6:30 pm at the Covert Township Hall located at 73943 Lake St., P.O. Box 35, Covert, MI 49043-0035. The items to be considered at this public hearing include, in brief, the following:

1. A request by Verizon Wireless and APC Towers, LLC, for Special Use Permit/Site Plan Review for the proposed construction of a 199 ft (overall height) monopole telecommunication structure pursuant to Section 18.32 – Wireless Communications Facilities, Zoning Ordinance. Subject property is situated at the northeast corner of 34th Avenue and 72nd Street (33405 72nd Street) and is within the LD-2 Low Density Residential District. (#80-07-013-024-00)

2. Such other and further matters as may properly come before the Planning Commission for this meeting.

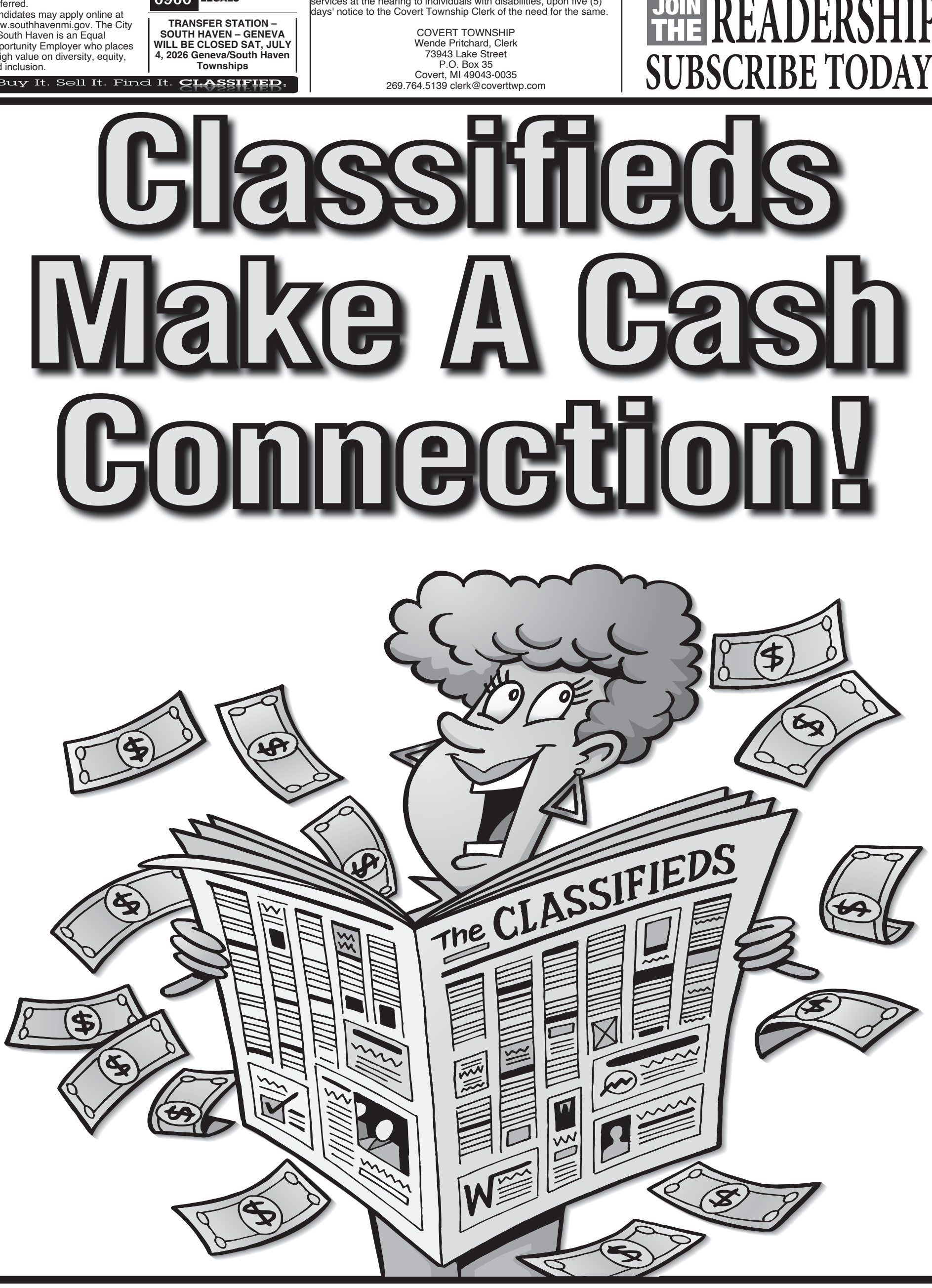
Written comments concerning the above matters may be submitted to the chair of the Covert Township Planning Commission, or to the Covert Township Clerk, at any time prior to the public hearing, and may further be submitted to the Planning Commission at the public hearing.

Covert Township will provide necessary, reasonable auxiliary aids and services at the hearing to individuals with disabilities, upon five (5) days' notice to the Covert Township Clerk of the need for the same.

COVERT TOWNSHIP
Wende Pritchard, Clerk
73943 Lake Street
P.O. Box 35
Covert, MI 49043-0035
269.764.5139 clerk@coverttwp.com

JOIN THE READERSHIP.
SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

Classifieds Make A Cash Connection!



Overisel Lumber celebrates century of service in Michigan

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Overisel Lumber as a new chamber member.

According to a news release, the chamber held a ribbon cutting ceremony celebrating the company's long history of serving Southwest Michigan.

"Founded in 1925 in Overisel, Mich., Overisel Lumber has spent more than a century providing quality building materials and exceptional customer service," the release stated.

The company has remained family owned and operated throughout its history, growing from a single lumber yard into a trusted supplier with locations across the region.

"The South Haven location opened in 1974, reflecting the company's long-standing commitment to the community," the release stated.

Today, Overisel Lumber continues to serve homeowners, contractors and builders with a knowledgeable team and a wide selection of lumber, building materials, windows, doors, decking, hardware and other products for projects of every size.

"We are excited to welcome Overisel Lumber to the Chamber," Executive Director of the South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce Brandy Key said in the release. "As a family-owned business with deep roots in Southwest Michigan and more than 50 years in South Haven, Overisel Lumber has built a reputation for quality, service, and community commitment. We look forward to supporting their continued success."

Photos provided

The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Overisel Lumber as a new chamber member with a special ribbon cutting ceremony.

The family-owned company, Overisel Lumber, was founded in 1925 and opened their South Haven location in 1974.

Over the years, the company has expanded its footprint while remaining true to its family values. Leadership has been passed through generations of the Slenk family, and today Greg, Jason and Lee Slenk continue that tradition.

In 2025, Overisel Lumber further expanded its reach with the acquisition of Sethco Lumber in Muskegon, Mich., strengthening its presence throughout West Michigan.

"The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce is proud to welcome Overisel Lumber and encourages the community to learn more about the company and the products and services they offer," the release stated.

Zo's Mini Donuts now open in SH

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Zo's Mini Donuts as a new chamber member.

According to a news release, the chamber held a special ribbon cutting ceremony celebrating the business's newest location inside South Pier Creamery & Market at 407 Phoenix Street in downtown South Haven.

"We have been wanting to expand to South Haven for years," the team at Zo's Mini Donuts said in the release. "We are so excited to finally have that chance and cannot wait to bring hot and fresh donuts to the community."

Zo's Mini Donuts has grown to five locations across Southwest Michigan and employs 28 local youth. Their newest venture brings their signature sweet treats to South Haven, where guests can find them inside South Pier Creamery & Market.

"Zo's Mini Donuts is dedicated to serving fresh, delicious donuts at an affordable price while creating a welcoming space where families, friends and visitors can come together and make lasting memories," the release stated.

Guests can choose from three classic flavors including: Glaze, Cinnamon Sugar and Powdered Sugar. Each donut is made fresh to order, delivering a warm, light and melt-in-your-mouth experience with every bite.

For more information about Zo's Mini Donuts, visit their social media pages and be sure to use #meetme@zos.

Photos provided

The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Zo's Mini Donuts as a new chamber member with a special ribbon cutting at their new South Haven location.

Zo's Mini Donuts have grown to five locations across Southwest Michigan and employs 28 local youth.

New boardwalk and trails complete at Porter Legacy Dunes

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently joined the South Haven Area Recreation Authority and the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy to celebrate the grand opening of Porter Legacy Dunes.

According to a new release, the recreation authority and the land conservancy partnered to protect Porter Legacy Dunes in 2020 with support from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, along with significant contributions from the land conservancy and its donors.

"The Porter Legacy Dunes boardwalk creates an opportunity for everyone to connect with nature and experience the incredible beauty of our lakeshore," SHARA Director Chris Van Hekken said in the release. "This project reflects our community's commitment to accessibility, conservation and public recreation."

Since then, additional funding and partnerships have helped bring the vision to life, including support from Entergy Corporation, the National Park Service, the University of Michigan, Visit South Haven and community donors.

"Porter Legacy Dunes continues our strong partnership with SHARA," Executive Director of Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy Mike Larson said in the release. "We're excited for this opportunity to manage and protect the rare natural features of this beautiful preserve and to create more opportunities for people to enjoy and learn about nature while protecting it for future generations."

While the boardwalk and trail system are now complete, future planned enhancements include: seating areas and interpretive signage to further enhance the visitor experience

"The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce congratulates SHARA and SWMLC on the opening of Porter Legacy Dunes and celebrates this remarkable addition to the region's recreational and natural resources," the release stated.

Photos provided

The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently celebrated the grand opening of Porter Legacy Dunes.

The boardwalk and trail system are now compete at the newly opened Porter Legacy Dunes.

South Haven community members joined in to walk the newly finished boardwalk and trail system at the Porter Legacy Dunes grand opening.

The Spotlight
A Weekly Guide To Services & Business Around Town.

Confused about your health insurance options?
Under 65 health plan available now
Call Dale K. Morgan
"DK"
Your local Medicare expert since 1994
269-637-6619

JENSEN'S EXCAVATING INCORPORATED
Driveways • Water & Sewer • Septic Systems • Demolition
Crushed Concrete • Sand • Gravel • Stone • Topsoil
www.JensensExcavating.com
(269) 637-5642

Driver's License Restoration
It's a Process... We Can Help!
Drunk Driving & Criminal Defense
"Friends... Don't Let Friends Plead Guilty!"
Law Office of Frederick J. Taylor
269-388-6060 1-800-250-FRED

MILLER
D.L. MILLER FUNERAL HOME, INC.
Bangor Chapel
258 W. Monroe Street
Bangor, MI 49013
(269) 427-7551
Ryan K. Oliver, Owner/Manager
Bloomingdale Chapel
203 East Spring
P.O. Box 171
Bloomingdale, MI 49026
(269) 521-3121
Floyd Decker, Manager

If interested in including your business here contact freid@thehp.com

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9 to 10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

South Haven Memorial Library: Bridge Card Game from 1 to 4 p.m. every Tuesday and Wednesday. Open to the public. Beginners are welcome.

Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for students grades 6 through 12 every Monday from 3 to 5 p.m.

South Haven Farmers Market: Open from 8 a.m. to 2pm on Saturdays, from May to October; and on Wednesdays from June through August.

South Haven Center for the Arts: National juried exhibition with the Arts and Aging Partnership of Southwest Michigan on display from June 20 to Aug. 1.

South Haven Memorial Library: Kids story time and yoga class at 10 a.m. on Mondays.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Fish tales storytime from 11 a.m. to noon on Wednesdays.

June

29 – South Haven Memorial Library: Kids Bingo at 5 p.m.

30 – South Haven Memorial Library: Preschool Storytime at 11 a.m.

30 – South Haven Memorial Library: Sticker Exchange Program from 1 to 2 p.m.

July

1 – DayDreamer Domes: family pool day. $30 for family of four and $5 for additional children ages 6 and up.

3 – Light up the Lake Fireworks

4 – 4th of July Parade at 11 a.m.

4-5 – South Haven Center for the Arts: 67th annual South Haven art fair.

5 – Rotary Club: Pancake Breakfast from 7:30 a.m. to noon at the downtown pavilion.

6 – South Haven Memorial Library: Pasta Paleontology at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. Dig into science with a side of pasta. Use noodles and other materials to build and explore dinosaur bones and fossils in this hands-on STEM activity.

7 – South Haven Memorial Library: South Haven strummers from 6 to 7 p.m.

7 – Visit South Haven: Coffee with Kendra from 10 to 11 a.m. at the Visit South Haven Office.

8 – South Haven Memorial Library: Worm Hotel at 10:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Check in your wiggly guests. Build your own worm habitat and learn how these underground creatures help our earth thrive.

8 – Area Agency on Aging: Dementia-friendly movie "Grease" at 11:30 a.m. at the Michigan Theatre.

8 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

9 – South Haven Area Young Professionals: monthly social networking event from 5:50 to 6:30 p.m. at Captain Lou's.

9 – South Haven Memorial Library: Storytime at 11 a.m. Make a dinosaur excavation kit.

10 – Lakeside Social: Glow Bowling from noon to 9 p.m.

10 – South Haven Memorial Library: Preschool Art at 11 a.m. Sarah Rydecki will lead preschoolers and their adults in hands on art activities. programing will be geared towards 3 to 5 year olds.

10 – Michigan Maritime Museum: Maritime makers craft activity event from 1 to 3 p.m.

11 – South Haven Garden Club: Annual garden walk from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Starting at Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum South Haven featuring garden tours, flower/plant Sale, gift boutique and treasure barn.

11 – South Haven Memorial Library: Tot Shabbat hosted by First Hebrew Congregation of South Haven from 5 to 6 p.m.

11 – Al Van Humane Society: monthly meet and greet from noon to 2 p.m. at Tractor Supply Co.

12 – American Legion Post 49: Sunday breakfast buffet from 8 a.m. to noon. Cost $10.

12 – South Haven Dragon Boat Association: Dragon Boat social paddle from 2:30 to 4 p.m. Check-in begins at 2:30 p.m. Cost $10, first visit is free.

13 – South Haven Memorial Library: Kids Bingo at 5 p.m. Grab your dabbers and get ready for a roaring good time. Join us for a few rounds of Bingo with prizes.

14 – South Haven Memorial Library: Preschool storytime at 11 a.m. Books, rhymes and wiggles – dino style. Preschool storytime features age-appropriate stories and activities for our littlest explorers.

15 – South Haven Memorial Library: Friends of the South Haven library meeting from 2 to 3 p.m. Public is welcome.

16 – South Haven Memorial Library: Storytime at 11 a.m. and design a dinosaur necklace.

16 – Lake Michigan College: vegetable garden session two from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at the hoop house at the South Haven campus. Cost $15 for each session.

17 – South Haven Memorial Library: Movie – Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs at 2 p.m.

18 – South Haven Theatre Series: "Audrey Hepburn" written and performed by Leslie Goddard, Ph.D. at 7:30 p.m. at Listiak High School auditorium. Tickets cost $15 with free admission for students.

18 – Senior Services of Van Buren County: 4th annual gala at 5 p.m. Food, dancing and auction. Tickets on sale for $25.

20 – South Haven Memorial Library: Tie dye from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. Get colorful and a little messy. Create your own tie dye masterpiece to wear all summer long.

22 – South Haven Memorial Library: Dinosaur trivia at 6 p.m. Think you know your dinos? Put your prehistoric knowledge to the test in a fun evening of dinosaur trivia and friendly competition.

22 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

23 – South Haven Memorial Library: Storytime at 11 a.m. and enjoy salt dough fossils.

24 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy art at 11 a.m. Head outside for some seriously fun, seriously messy art-making. This special outdoor session at the pavilion is all about creativity without limits.

24 – South Haven Performance Series: featuring Vox GR at 7 p.m. at Peace Lutheran Church.

24 – South Haven Memorial Library: Movie – The Good Dinosaur at 2 p.m.

26 – South Haven Dragon Boat Association: Dragon Boat social paddle from 2:30 to 4 p.m. Check-in begins at 2:30 p.m. Cost $10, first visit is free.

27 – South Haven Memorial Library: Kids Bingo at 5 p.m. Grab your dabbers and get ready for a roaring good time. Join us for a few rounds of Bingo with prizes.

28 – South Haven Memorial Library: Preschool storytime at 11 a.m. Books, rhymes and wiggles – dino style. Preschool storytime features age-appropriate stories and activities for our littlest explorers.

28 – Historical Association of South Haven: Old-fashioned ice cream social from 2 to 4 p.m. featuring ice cream from DeGrandchamp's Farm Store and the Casco Band. The event will take place on the lawn at Hartman School, 355 Hubbard St.

29 – South Haven Memorial Library: Glitter dino jars at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. Create a sparkling glitter jar featuring your favorite dinosaur to take home as a dazzling keepsake.

30 – South Haven Memorial Library: Storytime at 11 a.m. Join us for the last storytime of summer reading that includes a mystery dinosaur craft/

30 – South Haven Memorial Library: Henna art at 6 p.m. Registration is required.

31 – Michigan Maritime Museum: Maritime makers craft activity event from 1 to 3 p.m.

31 – South Haven Memorial Library: Glow in the dark art from noon to 4 p.m. End summer reading with a bang and a glow. Create a luminous work of art that comes alive in the dark during this special drop-in event.

Southside Denny rocks South Haven in Father's Day concert

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — International touring artist Southside Denny returned to South Haven for a special Father's Day concert of Chicago blues and soulful rock on Sunday at First Congregational UCC.

According to a news release, Denny is originally from South Bend, Ind. and has performed for many years in Chicago at Buddy Guy's Legends and appeared regularly with Luther Allison, Sugar Blue and Pinetop Perkins.

Denny was an opening act for a Who's Who of Chicago blues acts that included Ray Charles, Lonnie Mack, Buddy Guy, Albert Collins, Stevie Ray Vaughn and Taj Mahal. He also shared the stage with many legendary rockers including The Beach Boys, John Fogerty, Edgar Winter, BTO, Three Dog Night and Styxx.

In 2007, Denny relocated to Montreal, Quebec, Canada and has released 10 albums.

He has since performed at the International Festival du Jazz de Montréal, the International Festival du blues de Mont Tremblant, Riverfront Blues, Trois Rivières en Blues and other venues.

For more information about Southside Denny's music, go to www.southsidedenny.com.

For information about First Congregational UCC's concert series, call Diane and Lisa at 269-637-3804 (opt. 5).

PriorityHealth

Confused about Medicare?
Get an expert opinion.

Plans start at $0 per month.
Contact me today to learn more!

Dale K. Morgan
Red Arrow Insurance Agency
269.637.6619 (TTY users call 711)
dalemorgan@i2k.com
15 72nd St, South Haven
By appointment only

Priority Health has HMO-POS and PPO plans with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in Priority Health Medicare depends on contract renewal. Priority Health complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1.888.389.6648 (TTY: 711)

ملحوظة: إذا كنت تتحدث اذكر اللغة، فإن خدمات المساعدة اللغوية تتوافر لك بالمجان. اتصل برقم 1.888.389.6648 (رقم هاتف الصم والبكم: 711).

Y0056_400040021900_M CMS-accepted 09242018 ©2019 Priority Health 11003M8 11/19

White Space Sells

People Do Read Small Ads. You Did!

RESERVE THIS SPACE TODAY!

FOCUS

Stefani Reynolds / AFP

This photo illustration created in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 16, 2023, shows an AI girl generator in front of an image of school busses. When Ellis, a 14-year-old from Texas, woke up one October morning with several missed calls and texts, they were all about the same thing: nude images of her circulating on social media. That she had not actually taken the pictures didn't make a difference, as artificial intelligence makes so-called "deepfakes" more and more realistic. The source images of Ellis and a friend, also a victim, were lifted from Instagram, their faces then placed on naked bodies below. Other students – all girls – were also targeted, with the photos shared with other classmates on Snapchat.

As AI use in schools grows, lawmakers and districts scramble to set up guardrails

By ROBBIE SEQUEIRA
Stateline.org (TNS)

With many students and educators already using widely available artificial intelligence tools, state lawmakers and school districts are playing catch-up on AI policies.

In Maryland, for example, AI usage policies for K-12 schools are "all over the map," Democratic state Sen. Katie Fry Hester said.

In some school districts, she said, AI use is encouraged, while in others it is restricted, or – a worst-case scenario for Hester – there is little to no policy guidance at all.

"What we heard repeatedly is that the teachers were feeling like they had to navigate artificial intelligence entirely on their own," Hester said.

Hester said square one for lawmakers is AI literacy, which was the aim of new legislation that she sponsored and that was signed into law in May. It requires an AI coordinator in each school system, a statewide AI professional development for teachers and AI literacy to be a component of career readiness and computer science standards for K-12 students. It also requires the state Department of Education to provide certain guidance on AI.

Many other states have also been trying to create AI policies for schools. Lawmakers filed more than 134 bills across 31 states this year related to AI in education, focusing on data privacy, usage restriction in the classroom, literacy and training, according to MultiState, a government relations firm.

A survey by the Center for Democracy & Technology showed that a large majority of teachers (85 percent) reported using AI in their classroom during the 2024-25 school year, while 86 percent of students said they'd used AI for either personal or school-related reasons. But only about half of teachers and students reported that they received some training or information about AI from someone at their school, and few received training or information on risks of AI use.

A turning point for schools came with the rollout of ChatGPT in 2022, said Noelle Ellerson Ng, chief advocacy and governance officer for the School Superintendents Association. "AI was something that could not be gatekept," said Ellerson Ng. "It was in the classroom the minute students were able to access it."

Her association does not take positions on state AI bills or policies. But she said districts are trying to avoid knee-jerk, reactive policies such as New York City's brief 2022 ban of ChatGPT because of fears about cheating.

Some states have made progress in laying the groundwork for AI policy in K-12.

Ohio has set a July 1 deadline for every school district, community school and STEM school to adopt an AI use policy. The state's model policy recommends that districts address student and staff uses, privacy, ethical use, teacher-specific uses, vendor agreements, third-party AI tools and student assessments.

A new Idaho law signed in March requires local school districts and charter schools to devise local policies for AI usage in K-12 schools, requires state standards for AI literacy and education training and ensures that no AI "replaces or eliminates a human teacher."

An Oklahoma law enacted last month requires AI tools to be age-appropriate and requires teachers to review anything AI produces before using it in the classroom. It also allows parents to opt their children out of using AI tools. The law also directs the state education department to develop AI guidance and requires local school boards to set policies before the 2027-28 school year.

Yet even as schools are being sold on AI products by numerous vendors, there's a growing skepticism about AI in classrooms. It follows a similar backlash about social media and digital technology's academic and mental health effects on students, which has led to more states and districts putting in place cellphone bans and rethinking their reliance on laptops.

In the Center for Democracy & Technology survey, half of students said using AI in class made them feel less connected to their teachers, and 70 percent of teachers said they were concerned that students' use of AI was preventing them from learning important skills.

Schools need to weigh the benefits of adopting AI tools in the classroom against their effect on student privacy, mental health and social skills, said Sue Thotz, director of outreach for Common Sense Media, a nonprofit advocacy group focused on technology and its effect on children and families.

Schools, Thotz said, may be the "only mandated safe space" where students can learn to use and access emerging technology. But she and other education experts believe districts need to increase scrutiny of products.

Globally, the market for AI products in K-12 schools was worth around $391.2 million in 2024, and could rise to more than $9 billion by 2034, according to market.us, a market research company. That includes AI products for tutoring, personalized learning, automated grading, lesson planning and administrative tasks.

"When I talk about AI literacy, it's not how to use AI. It's understanding how AI is built," said Thotz. "Why is it being created? Who's profiting off of this?"

'Giving a tool to children'

New York Assemblymember Robert Carroll said he uses artificial intelligence in his own work and sees its value. As someone who struggled with dyslexia as a child, he also thinks technology can help students with disabilities.

But he also wants to keep AI out of most K-8 classroom instruction. Students should learn basic subject matter first – in conjunction with critical thinking – and then later use the tools that can assist them, he said.

Carroll, a Democrat, has introduced legislation that would prohibit the use of most AI in K-8 classrooms, with exceptions for diagnostic testing and support for students with disabilities.

"It is imperative that all children gain strong foundational skills, especially in literacy and numeracy, and it seems that AI is uniquely positioned to possibly undermine that," he said. "There's a difference between giving a tool to adults and giving a tool to children who have yet to master skills."

Rather than full bans, most bills seeking to restrict AI have opted to focus on age restrictions, parental opt-outs, oversight and bans on using AI to replace teachers.

This year, Florida's "AI Bill of Rights" proposal would have included a statewide restriction on student access to AI instructional tools before sixth grade, with exceptions for use supervised by school personnel, English-learner translation support and disability accommodations. It overwhelmingly passed the Senate 37-1, but died in the House.

A new Connecticut law adds computer science to the required public school curriculum, including AI and emerging technologies. Connecticut lawmakers in 2025 failed to pass a bill aiming to stop AI from "replacing" public school educators.

Sophia Romee, the general manager of the GenAI Studio, an initiative studying how students and educators use generative AI at the College Board, the nonprofit that administers the Advanced Placement curriculum and SAT tests for high schools, said she is concerned that only about 1 in 5 districts that allow students to use generative AI have a formal policy governing its use.

The College Board's research, Romee said, shows many students are worried about becoming too reliant on AI, and that adults need to give clearer guidance about where using AI tools for brainstorming, revising and tutoring crosses the ethical line into cheating.

"Students are far more self-aware about AI's risks than headlines suggest."

Like aviation in 1905

Jason Coley, director of the Center for Academic Innovation at Maria College in Albany, New York, said the policy debate needs to move beyond whether schools are "for" or "against" the use of AI.

"The better question is what kinds of AI use are supervised, age appropriate, transparent, and tied to real learning," Coley said. Schools need guardrails around privacy, student data, bias, teacher training and equity of access, he said, but also permission to "experiment responsibly."

Ellerson Ng, of the School Superintendents Association, said superintendents see AI as part of a larger umbrella of disruptive technologies in schools that has evolved from calculators to laptops to cellphones. The lesson, she said, is that overreactive policy rarely works. She also said schools should not cover AI in a separate policy, but as part of a broader technology policy.

"I don't have a calculator policy. Why would I have an AI policy?" she said, describing how some district leaders think about the issue. "I have a technology policy."

With past technologies such as cellphones and laptops, adults could often control when students had access, Ellerson Ng said. With AI apps and platforms, many students accessed the tools before teachers, principals or state officials were even aware of them.

That makes bans difficult, she said. Schools can block tools on school-owned devices and networks, but "you're only one personal device away from social media and AI being in your schools."

Justin Reich, an associate professor of digital media at MIT, said that uncertainty around AI should make policymakers cautious about declaring best practices too soon.

Reich said states are trying to regulate classroom AI at a moment when the field is still so unstable that "writing a guide for AI in 2026 is like writing a guide for aviation in 1905" before airlines, airports or even commercial flight.

"If you were to take any of the AI literacy documents, AI readiness documents, even the moratorium documents, and put them against a checklist," said Reich, "there would be a lot of boxes in the 'we're making this up' column and not a lot in the 'we have evidence' column."

State lawmakers and school districts should be honest that they don't know what they're doing, are relying on limited expert information and that policy is subject to change with new information, Reich said.

"Lawmakers will need to be honest that what they propose now could be completely outdated in two years."

Stateline reporter Robbie Sequeira can be reached at rsequeira@stateline.org.

Stateline is part of States Newsroom, a national nonprofit news organization focused on state policy.

A group of mostly illegal dirt bike and powerful e-motorcycle riders taking over the streets downtown Los Angeles as they ride in and out of traffic, often doing tricks, on Oct. 25, 2025.
Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times / TNS

California's new *Hells Angels*

Teens on e-bikes cut a path of danger

By SALVADOR HERNANDEZ
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Mel Melcon / Los Angeles Times / TNS
A juvenile riding his e-bike on the Strand in Hermosa Beach, California on Nov. 10, 2023.

LOS ANGELES — Signs of the exploding popularity of e-bikes are everywhere.

Riders are showing up in massive groups at the beach, kids are popping wheelies on quiet residential roads and scores of others are showing up in emergency rooms with cuts, broken bones or worse.

An 81-year-old was allegedly killed in Lake Forest after a 14-year-old crashed into him after he was spotted doing wheelies. In Yorba Linda, a 12-year-old was critically injured while riding a modified e-motorcycle. In Oceanside, a rider fled from police in a chase that reached speeds up to 50 mph and, in Huntington Beach a man was attacked after riding his scooter through a crowd of more than 100 young e-bike riders.

Now, with graduations underway and summer around the corner, police across the state are looking for ways to pump the brakes on dangerous e-bike riding.

"If these bikes are not treated with respect and care, it could be just as dangerous as handing over a firearm," said Officer Brandon Pon, a collision investigator with the Los Angeles Police Department.

It's not just risky riding that's raised concerns. Online videos show riders how to easily modify bikes to increase speeds. Police said some bikes that are marketed for kids are more akin to motorcycles, reaching speeds of up to 50 mph. Some parents are unaware of the difference between e-bikes and e-motorcycles, police said, while others are knowingly handing over the fast, dangerous bikes to young and inexperienced riders.

The fast bikes, some of them illegal to use if the rider is not licensed, are easy to find and in April, California Attorney General Rob Bonta warned sellers, manufacturers and consumers that modified e-bikes, and those that exceed state regulations may be illegal for unlicensed riders.

Weeks later, Amazon de-listed several electric motorcycles from purchase in California, and law enforcement officials are looking for other ways to cut down on illegal riding before summer.

In Orange County, District Attorney Todd Spitzer has created a specialized unit to go after dangerous riders, including minors, and begun charging parents, too.

"If parents refuse to hold their children accountable, then I am going to hold parents accountable when they knowingly break the law," Spitzer said in a statement. "There is absolutely no reason a child should be handed the keys to a motorcycle and be sent on their way without training, without a license, and without the maturity to handle that kind of responsibility."

In San Diego, the risks and dangers have grown to a point where on May 28, the county's health department issued a notice warning doctors about the increasing number of e-bike related injuries.

The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency recommended physicians to encourage helmet use and counseled parents about the differences between e-bikes, the risks of riding in tandem, and local and state laws.

But with few regulations on the books and companies designing some to look like motorcycles, interest in e-bikes has surged. At first, they were spotted in more affluent communities, with the cost of e-bikes ranging anywhere between $1,000 to $6,000 for stock models.

But soon they started to be spotted everywhere.

And the casualties connected to e-bikes are mounting.

In Orange County, an 81-year-old Vietnam veteran died in a collision with a 14-year-old on an e-bike. Last month, a 12-year-old riding an e-bike was seriously injured after colliding with a Tesla in San Diego. In Sacramento County, a 60-year-old nurse died in a collision with a teen on a biking path.

Along with these incidents, a whole other set of issues arise when riders post a call for a "ride-out" on social media, which can trigger a gathering of dozens of riders or more.

Law enforcement officials said the large crowds can be known to get rowdy, block large streets as they ride en mass and in a few occasions turned violent.

Sam El-Said, a 51-year-old from Huntington Beach, was attacked by several young men May 9 after he and his wife rode their e-scooters through a crowd of more than 100 people on e-bikes. Two minors have been arrested.

"When they get in these packs they get brazen," El-Said said. "I can't tell what provoked them, but I know I'm not the only one that's experienced these types of things."

He's seen the large crowd of e-bike riders gather regularly near the beach, he said, on the weekends and summer months.

"These kids will ride down the street and play chicken with cars," he said. "They just go out there and wreck havoc."

Summertime will likely bring more riders out, and police are trying to get as much information and education out to the public as they can before to prevent more injuries on the street, Pon said.

Part of the issue, Pon said, is that parents are unaware to the types of e-bikes that are being purchased and instead providing teenagers with e-motorcycles and dirt bikes.

E-bikes in California are split into three classifications, depending on features and maximum speeds.

Class 1 bicycles have an electric motor that engages only when manual pedals are used, with a maximum motor speed of 20 mph. Class 2 bicycles also provide electrical power up to 20 mph, but have a throttle that can be used without using the pedals. Class 3 e-bikes are similar to Class 1 pedal bicycles, but have a maximum speed of 28 mph, and the rider must be over 16 years of age.

But electric cycles that can boost power past 28 mph, have a motor stronger than 750 watts or do not have pedals are not legally considered e-bikes in California, according to the California Department of Justice. Those vehicles are instead considered either electric mopeds or motorcycles, and are required to be registered with the DMV and the rider to have a motorcycle license.

Bikes must have a label that identifies what class of e-bike they are, and the California Department of Justice earlier this month warned retailers that misrepresenting electric motorcycles as e-bikes is a crime.

"We have to get this out there because I do believe that most of these collisions, for the large part, they're likely preventable," Pon said.

On May 10, after the warning went out, Amazon agreed to stop selling e-bikes that went over the state's limit.

"We are in the process of removing e-bike listings that do not comply with California speed limit regulations," the company confirmed to The Times in an email.

The young age of riders, and the speeds that can be reached by e-bikes and e-motorcycles can become a deadly combination, said Dr. Alan Nager, from Children's Hospital Los Angeles.

"They go faster than regular bikes, they're heavier, they're more difficult to maneuver and they require additional coordination and awareness," Nager said.

As director of emergency and transport medicine at the hospital, Nager said he's seen the impact and risks of the electric bicycles first hand, and they're showing up in the emergency room more often.

For the past three years, Nager said, the number of kids and teenagers admitted to Children's Hospital Los Angeles with e-bike related injuries has doubled each year.

In 2023, the hospital recorded eight patients with e-bike related injuries, Nager said. In 2024, the hospital saw 16 patients and, in 2025, 36 injured riders were admitted. So far this year, Nager said, the hospital has seen 21 patients with e-bike injuries through the first five months of the year.

The hospital also sees several patients that are injured from traditional pedal bike accidents, Nager said, but e-bike riders tend to suffer more severe and serious injuries, a fact he attributes to the speed of the bikes.

"There's a relationship between higher speed, less coordination and more chances of an accident," Nager said.

Quantifying exactly how many crashes, injuries and fatalities occur is a challenge, however. Multiple law enforcement agencies still classify e-bike crashes with pedal bike accidents, and the recent appearance of e-bikes has made data difficult to collect.

"Specifically, incident and crash reporting is seldom specific enough to indicate these bike types, with e-bike crashes often recorded as bicycle crashes, and e-scooters often recorded as pedestrian crashes," a spokesperson for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in a statement.

One study by San Jose University's Mineta Transportation Institute published in December found that data was hard to collect for the same reason. It found, however, that according to the National Fatality Analysis Reporting System, at least 154 fatal e-bike crashes had been recorded between 2022 and 2023.

Another study published this year by the American Academy Orthopaedic Surgeons, looking at electric and pedal bike injuries at a San Diego trauma center, found e-bike injuries in San Diego had jumped by more than 300 percent between 2019 and 2023.

In Orange County, the sheriff's department is working with schools and Orange County Transportation Authority for educational programs, said Sgt. Gerard McCann of the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

For example, several schools require students to register their bicycles – electric or pedal powered – if they're taken to and from school.

But as many parents know, if there's a new rule, there will likely be a child out there trying to break it. Earlier this month, McCann said, deputies were called to a local high school after students riding e-bikes, including some that appeared to be motorcycles, were spotted locking them in a secluded area away from campus to avoid registering them.

A recent review of e-bike-related citations by the Orange County Sheriff's Department also showed the growing problem. E-bike-related citations by the department jumped to 259 in 2025, according to the department – up from 173 the previous year. The two most common tickets, according to the data, was riding without a helmet and unsafe riding.

Online, teens are also watching videos on how to remove the speed limits on their bikes, so they can go past the legal limit.

Some of the modifications are so particular, Pon said, they go unnoticed without specific training or expertise.

"It's almost impossible for law enforcement to identify right off the bat, a simple modification," Pon said.

The modifications can be simple and easily made on several models with just a few basic tools, but can increase speeds of the bike up to 50 mph. Video tutorials show how to override control panels that limit speeds, and how to change out batteries and motors.

It also isn't uncommon for law enforcement to try to stop a rider on a e-bike, or an illegal motorcycle, and having the minor and their friends take off.

In Newport Beach, police tried to stop an underage rider on May 9 when they spotted him riding an illegal electric motorcycle but, according to video posted by police, the boy fled from police. At times, the boy drove onto opposing traffic at high speed, prompting police to abandon the chase.

He was later arrested at his home, and police said they had previous encounters with him. In a statement, police said they would be recommending charges against his mother.

When deputies do make a stop and try to reach out to parents about the risks with the illegal e-bike or motorcycle, McCann said parents are often not aware of the differences between them. A few parents, he said, are angry that the vehicles are seized after learning their kids are not allowed to ride them.

"That's part of the problem," McCann said. "It's really the parents who are paying for them."

HEALTH

Rural areas lagging behind in cancer treatment and prevention

Rich and urban areas increasingly leave dying from cancer in rearview

By ARTHUR COSBY
Mississippi State University
(The Conversation)

Top and Above: Getty Images

In a diverse country, however, not everyone or every place benefits equally from improvements in health and medicine. Where people live can profoundly influence their chances of dying from cancer.

Cancer in the United States experienced a dramatic turnaround in 1991. Prior to that year, cancer deaths had been increasing for decades, peaking at 215 deaths per 100,000 people, meaning about 1 in 4 deaths were attributed to cancer. Then it began to consistently decline, decreasing by 34 percent between 1991 and 2022. This amounted to an estimated 4.5 million fewer cancer deaths during that period.

When the second-most frequent cause of death in the nation begins to decline, the effects are considerable. Improvements in cancer screening, treatment and prevention have led to increases in longevity and well-being.

In a diverse country, however, not everyone or every place benefits equally from improvements in health and medicine. In coordination with my colleague Viswadeep Lebakula, research from my team of social scientists and I found that where people live can profoundly influence their chances of dying from cancer.

Rural mortality penalty

While national data on cancer deaths can provide a useful report card on how successful a country has been on improving its health, it can also mask large geographic differences.

My team and I examined cancer deaths rates for almost 3,000 U.S. counties between 1981 and 2019. By looking at cancer mortality at the county level, we found a more complex picture of changing cancer death patterns than just examining the country overall.

Specifically, geographic differences between who benefited from the medical and public health improvements that reduced cancer deaths were stark.

Large urban centers along both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts consistently had the highest rates of cancer improvements. The heavily populated corridor from Boston to Washington, D.C., had steep declines in cancer deaths. For example, the four largest boroughs in New York City – Manhattan, Queens, Bronx and Brooklyn – saw cancer death rates decline over 40 percent between 1991 and 2019. The largest and wealthiest borough, Manhattan, had the highest improvement at 47 percent fewer deaths.

Similarly, large coastal urban centers, such as Miami, the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, San Diego and Seattle, saw very large improvements in cancer mortality. In the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, wealthy urban counties had decreases in cancer rates that substantially exceeded the national rate of 34 percent. Specifically, Marin County saw a 47 percent decline, San Mateo County a 44 percent decline and San Francisco County a 40 percent decline.

It is a much different story for rural counties in the middle of the country.

Prior to 1991, rural and urban America generally shared similar rates of cancer mortality. When the national rate started to decline, however, rural and small-town America lagged behaind large urban centers. These nonmetropolitan areas had much lower rates of declining cancer deaths: 20 percent for Mississippi, 23 percent for Arkansas, 24 percent for West Virginia and 29 percent for Montana. Around 458 rural counties even experienced increasing cancer mortality.

Notably, these differences in cancer mortality between rural and urban counties were originally small and only began to increase when overall national cancer rates began to drop. The cancer rate in rural, small-town America was improving overall, but metropolitan America was improving substantially faster.

These disparities suggest that the medical and social changes leading to reduced cancer mortality were concentrated in more metropolitan regions.

Higher income, fewer cancer deaths

We found that county median family income had a strong influence on cancer death rates.

When cancer death rates peaked in 1991, there was initially little difference between counties with the highest and lowest income levels. By 2019, the 10 percent of the U.S. population living in counties with the highest median incomes had mortality improvements approximately seven times greater than the 10 percent living in the lowest-income counties.

The overall pattern was very clear: As county income increased, improvements in cancer mortality increased. Counties with the least financial capacity to deal with the burden of cancer saw the least improvement.

The American Cancer Society and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have identified multiple factorsunderlying declining cancer death rates. These include advances in cancer prevention, screening and treatment. But there are considerable county and state differences in the adoption of preventive measures and access to cancer services.

For example, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths and has seen the strongest decline in death rates. Tobacco control strategies – smoking cessation programs, health warnings, increased taxes on tobacco products, bans on tobacco purchases by minors and smoking in public place – have been especially successful in reducing deaths from lung cancer. Geographic differences in adoption of these tobacco control measures can partially explain why some places have higher cancer death rates compared to others, especially for lung cancer.

For example, New York City aggressively instituted tobacco control measures, and the results show. My team found that New York's Manhattan borough had 60 percent fewer lung cancer deaths in 2019 compared to 1991. At the same time, many states and counties – often rural and less affluent – have adopted fewer and weaker tobacco control measures. Rural communities often have higher smoking rates and exposure to tobacco smoke in the home, along with fewer smoke-free laws and less support for tobacco control policies.

THE CONVERSATION

Innovation over access

Cancer can devastate families and communities, both emotionally and economically. The U.S. has become more successful in developing innovations to treat cancer than in equitably distributing these innovations across the nation.

While most of the U.S. is experiencing improvements in cancer mortality, these benefits are greatest in urban and wealthy areas. Developing tobacco control policies and screening techniques tailored to rural settings, as well as increasing access to advanced treatments in rural and poor settings, could help improve cancer mortality for more people.

Will the gap between rural and urban America – and the gap between rich and poor America – decline or grow? Answering this question will require a better understanding of the unique needs of everyday people in their communities.

Arthur Cosby is a Professor of Sociology at Mississippi State University. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

Getty Images

MAYO CLINIC Q&A

What do I need to know about skin cancer protection?

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK
(TNS)

DEAR MAYO CLINIC: A friend has had several small skin cancers removed, and that made me wonder if I'm at risk, too. What everyday habits can help reduce my risk of skin cancer?

ANSWER: Whether skies are clear or overcast, your skin is exposed to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. UVB rays are the primary cause of sunburn, while UVA rays penetrate more deeply, contributing to premature aging, such as fine wrinkles and sunspots. Both forms of UV radiation increase the risk of skin cancer.

A tan is not a sign of health; it's evidence of skin injury. There's no safe way to tan in the sun or with indoor tanning. Fortunately, daily habits can protect your skin and reduce your risk of skin cancer.

Use sunscreen consistently. Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen that protects against both UVB and UVA rays with an SPF of at least 30. Be aware of the expiration date and replace your sunscreen regularly. Keep it out of the heat and direct sunlight, which can degrade its effectiveness.

Spray sunscreens are typically easier to apply to hairy skin. Makeup also can contain sun-protective ingredients, but it should meet the same minimum standard of a broad-spectrum sunscreen and an SPF of at least 30. Sunscreens may contain organic or inorganic ingredients, or a combination of both.

Inorganic (mineral) sunscreens contain minerals such as titanium dioxide and zinc oxide and provide excellent, broad-spectrum protection. These ingredients tend to be thicker and may leave a whitish residue on your skin.

Organic (chemical) sunscreen filters are more common and tend to be lighter, easier to spread and less visible on the skin, but they may not have as much UVA protection as mineral options.

The Food and Drug Administration recently announced its proposal to add a new organic sunscreen ingredient, bemotrizinol (BEMT), to its approved list for use in the U.S. BEMT provides protection against both UVA and UVB, and it has low levels of absorption through the skin into the body. This is exciting news because the U.S. doesn't have as many approved filters compared to other countries.

Apply sunscreen whenever you're outdoors – even on cloudy days, when up to 80 percent of harmful rays penetrate the clouds. When applying sunscreen:

- Don't forget places like the tops of your ears and feet, the back of your neck, and areas where a beard might not be as thick.
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours.
- Remember to reapply more often with water exposure or sweating because this reduces how long the sunscreen remains effective. Water-resistant sunscreen provides protection for about 40 to 80 minutes.
- Apply more sunscreen than you think. Most people apply only a quarter to half of the amount needed to reach the advertised SPF on the product label. A simple strategy is to apply a full layer, then repeat to create a "double coat" to ensure adequate coverage.

Wear photoprotective clothing. Long-sleeved shirts, pants, wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses provide consistent protection without the need for reapplying sunscreen. Not all clothing blocks the same amount of UV rays. Test it by holding it up to the light. If you can see the light through the clothing, you'll know that UV rays can pass through, too.

Many brands now offer lightweight, breathable clothing with built-in ultraviolet protection rated with an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF). For water activities, rash guards offer convenient, reliable sun protection. Tops are available in short- and long-sleeved styles, with or without hoods.

Avoid intentional tanning. Indoor tanning significantly increases the risk of cancer. Tanning beds emit intense UV radiation and can increase melanoma risk by 20 percent with just one session. Using indoor tanning before age 35 can increase melanoma risk by 75 percent. Dermatologists see patients in their 30s with multiple skin cancers and advanced sun damage after extensive tanning bed use in their teens and 20s.

If you want a bronzed glow without the risk of UV rays, sunless tanning products are a safe alternative. Spray tans and lotions containing dihydroxyacetone can create the appearance of tanned skin without UV exposure.

Be mindful of peak sun hours. If you love being outdoors, whether it's hanging at the beach, working in the garden, hiking on a fall day or skiing down a mountain, it's wise to use a combination of sun-protective behaviors, including sunscreen, photoprotective clothing and seeking shade when possible. Consistent sun-protective behaviors will substantially reduce your risk of skin cancer while allowing you to enjoy time outdoors safely.

Vitamin D shows promise for hard-to-treat pancreatic cancers

By KARL HILLE
The Baltimore Sun (TNS)

Patients receiving a type of vitamin D lived longer after chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer in a small study run by researchers with the Salk Institute.

Among 36 patients with previously untreated pancreatic cancer that had metastasized or spread, those taking a type of vitamin D called paricalcitol experienced a significant survival boost one year after the trial, researchers from the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in La Jolla, California, found. The supplement, administered orally or by injection, reduced the presence of inflammation and fibroblasts: thick mats of connective tissue cells that form the protective shield around many cancers.

"This study really takes a novel approach for cracking therapeutic resistance in pancreatic cancer," study co-author Ronald Evans, professor of molecular and developmental biology at Salk, said in a center news release. "By using vitamin D analogs to engage the body's own natural system for dampening fibrotic and inflammatory responses, we can enable other therapies to do their job."

The study found that adding vitamin supplementation to chemotherapy was safe and appeared to reduce the density of protective tissue surrounding tumors while increasing the presence of immune T-cells, which are often blocked from entering tumors.

The Food and Drug Administration-approved synthetic form of vitamin D has been designed to last longer in the body and resist deterioration, they wrote.

They published their work in the journal Nature Cancer in May.

Pancreatic cancer is difficult to treat as it is rarely caught in its early stages, according to cancercenter.com. By the time symptoms appear, the tumor has usually spread to surrounding vital organs or metastasized. In addition, a pancreatic tumor's dense, fibrous barrier and mutated genes make it harder to treat with standard therapies. Standard chemotherapy can slow the cancer for some, but outcomes remain poor.

The researchers also found that patients with more receptors for vitamin D had a stronger response to the therapy. They said more testing is needed to see how and when to incorporate vitamin D into the therapy.

Getty Images

ASK THE PEDIATRICIAN

Healthy meals for children

By KIMBERLY MONTEZ, MD, MPH, FAAP and KOFI ESSEL, MD, MPH, FAAP
American Academy of Pediatrics (TNS)

Healthy meals are an important tool to help children learn. If families are looking for ways to make sure their child gets nutritious food at school, during breaks or at childcare, let your school or district know that you want to fill out an application for the National School Breakfast

Having healthy meals at school, during breaks and at childcare/after-school programs sets kids up for success so they can learn, grow and stay active. Healthy meals are an important tool to help children learn, just as much as textbooks and technology. Research shows that school meals are positive influences in kids' health as they ensure that all children can get the fuel they need.

The National School Breakfast and Lunch Program has been part of the United States school day since 1946. Any child can get meals if their school takes part and what your child pays will depend on your household income. Some children can get free- and reduced-price meals.

Families may be looking for ways to make sure their child gets nutritious food at school, during breaks or at childcare. If your children are eligible for meals, parents or caregivers can apply or sign up at any time of the year. Just let your school or district know that you want to fill out an application.

There are a variety of factors that can make children eligible for these kinds of programs. Children may be eligible if they live in a household that receives benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, the Food Distribution on Indian Reservations, Head Start and Early Head Start, and others. Children in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or in a family with migrant workers may also qualify.

Additionally, in certain communities with a high number of students who are at risk of not having enough to eat, the schools provide breakfast and lunch at no charge

Once the school year ends, parents and guardians may be concerned about their children getting enough food without the help of regular school meals.

Luckily, meals are available through the USDA Summer Nutrition Programs for Kids, also called SUN Programs.

The program – which is open to all children aged 18 years and under – provides on-site meals and snacks, and is held at schools, parks and other locations. You can find a summer meal site near home at the USDA's webpage on Summer Meal programs.

One such program, the Summer Meals To-Go program, is open to all children aged 18 years and under in some rural communities where SUN Meals are more difficult to access. These summer meals can be picked up or delivered to your home at no cost. In addition, many states have approved the Summer EBT program called SUN Bucks, allowing families additional money to purchase food for school-age children during the summer.

If you need help getting to your local meal site, ask if free transportation is available. Programs may provide free bus passes or other ways to and from the location. There may also be mobile feeding sites.

For children that spend time in childcare and Head Start programs that are part of the Child and Adult Care Food Program, nutritious meals and snacks are provided.

What if families are struggling to feed children on the weekends or school breaks when classes aren't in session? This is where school backpack programs come into play. These programs offer free grocery staples for children to be supported when they are home on short breaks from school.

The backpacks include healthy, easy-to-make food for kid-friendly meals. Most backpacks include enough food to make a few healthy meals so that kids can return to school ready to learn. Schools, after-school programs and community centers partner with food banks to distribute the backpacks to families. Most programs give backpacks every week on Fridays or the day before school break except for the summer.

You can search online to find a local backpack program.

If you are in need of further resources, your pediatrician can connect you to options in your community, including programs that provide access to food, safe housing, transportation, quality childcare and other supports. That is why your pediatrician asks all families that come into their care if they have enough food. It's OK to answer honestly; the questions are not to single you out. They are an opportunity for the health care team to provide resources for your family. Your pediatrician knows you try to be the best parent possible and wants to help!

If your family does not qualify for school meal benefits or your school does not participate in the Community Eligibility Provision and you are looking for other ways to feed your family, ask your pediatrician. They can connect you with food banks, food pantries and emergency food locations.

Kimberly Montez, MD, MPH, FAAP, is a Professor of General Academic Pediatrics and Social Sciences & Health Policy at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine. As a health services researcher and child health advocate, Dr. Montez has expertise in the social drivers of health, including food insecurity, community engagement and health equity. She is a co-author for the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and Food Research & Action Center Food Insecurity Toolkit for Pediatricians. Dr. Montez serves as an official spokesperson for the AAP and as an associate editor for the journal Pediatrics.

Kofi D. Essel, MD, MPH, FAAP, is a community pediatrician at Children's National Hospital (CNH) and Clinical Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the George Washington University (GWU) School of Medicine & Health Sciences in Washington, D.C. Dr. Essel has dedicated his career to advocacy/research around health care and public health workforce training, health disparities and community engagement, with expertise and national recognition in the areas of addressing diet-related chronic disease and food insecurity with patients and families. He is a co-author of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and Food Research & Action Center Food Insecurity Toolkit for Pediatricians and previously served as a member on the AAP Section on Obesity Executive Committee.

For strong bones, drink milk, filtered water and toss PFAs-loaded teflon cookware

By KARL HILLE
The Baltimore Sun (TNS)

Children with more exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAs, had lower forearm density by age 12 and could face greater fracture risk, researchers found, with girls apparently more vulnerable than boys.

"Adolescence is a key period for building strong bones, and achieving optimal bone mass during this time can reduce lifelong risks of fractures and osteoporosis," lead author Jessie P. Buckley, professor of epidemiology at the University of North Carolina, said in a statement. "Our findings suggest reducing PFAS exposure during key developmental windows could support healthier bones throughout life."

PFAs are a class of fluorinated compounds used in industrial and consumer products for their stain- and water-resistant properties. People are exposed to these chemicals through consumer products, indoor air, dust, drinking water, seafood and proximity to contaminated areas. PFAs are persistent in the environment and take years to diminish once inside the body.

PFAs are almost impossible to avoid, as widespread use has resulted in measurable amounts turning up in everything from fish and carrots to drinking water to food packaging to cookware and other products.

PFA substances have been detected in human bone tissue and marrow, and might compete with vitamin D by binding with the receptors that favor the vitamin. The UNC researchers compared the amount of PFA compounds in infants' umbilical blood and at ages 3, 8 and 12 years, to bone density measurements taken at age 12.

A key exposure window seems to be during pregnancy.

"These findings add to growing evidence that PFAs exposure during early life may carry long-term health consequences, underscoring the importance of efforts to reduce contamination in drinking water and consumer products," Buckley said.

Choosing cookware without PFAs and filtering drinking water might help reduce exposure.

Standard carbon filter pitchers won't cut it, according to information from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Look for manufacturers that have demonstrated that the water filter can remove PFAs to nondetectable levels. Filters that meet National Sanitation Foundation standards, such as NSF/ANSI 53 and 58, are lab-tested and certified to remove PFAs.

Getty Images

It's OK to use tap water for showering, brushing teeth, laundry and cleaning, as well as washing produce.

Unbanked vs. underbanked

6 key reasons (and solutions)

By KAREN BENNETT
Bankrate.com (TNS)

About 19 percent of American households – roughly 24.6 million people – either have no bank account or struggle to access traditional banking services. This isn't just a financial inconvenience; it's a barrier that costs families thousands of dollars annually and limits their ability to build wealth.

Unbanked households have no checking or savings accounts at banks or credit unions, while underbanked households have accounts but rely on alternative financial services like check-cashing or payday loans. Both groups face significant financial challenges, but the solutions differ based on their specific situations.

What does it mean to be unbanked vs. underbanked?

The terms "unbanked" and "underbanked" describe different levels of exclusion from traditional banking services.

Unbanked definition

Unbanked households have no checking or savings accounts at any bank or credit union. According to the latest FDIC survey, 4.2 percent of U.S. households – approximately 5.6 million people – are completely unbanked.

These individuals manage their finances through alternative methods:

- Prepaid debit cards
- Check-cashing services
- Money orders
- Cash transactions
- •Payment apps like PayPal or Venmo (without connected bank accounts)

Underbanked definition

The underbanked definition describes households that have a bank account but used at least one alternative financial service in the past 12 months. This group includes 19 million households who supplement traditional banking with services like:

- Payday loans
- Auto title loans
- Rent-to-own services
- Check-cashing services

Having a bank account doesn't automatically mean you're financially included. Many underbanked households turn to alternative services because their bank accounts don't meet their needs – whether due to low balances, poor credit, or limited banking hours.

Look out

The companies that operate alternative services such as payday loans, title loans and cash-checking services know that most of their customers have no other choice. With limited regulaton or oversight in many states, many charge exploitative or hidden fees that make them far more expensive than mainstream banking services.

6 key reasons why people become unbanked or underbanked

Here's a look at six common reasons people are unbanked, along with possible solutions for each problem or belief.

1. Minimum balance requirements

About 42 percent of unbanked households cite insufficient funds to meet minimum balance requirements as their primary barrier to banking.

Traditional banks often require minimum balances of $100 to $500 to avoid monthly maintenance fees of $10 to $15. For households living paycheck to paycheck, these requirements create barriers rather than opportunities.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Focus on accounts with no minimum balance requirements or low minimums you can realistically maintain. Many online banks like Capital One offer fee-free checking with no minimums. Here is Bankrate's complete list of savings accounts with no minimum deposit requirements.

2. Lack of trust in financial institutions

High-profile banking scandals, aggressive sales tactics and predatory practices have left many Americans skeptical of traditional banks. Around 15 unbanked households cited this as the reason why they were unbanked, according to the FDIC survey. This distrust keeps people trapped in expensive alternative financial services that cost significantly more than traditional banking.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Start with institutions that have strong consumer protection track records. Credit unions, which are member-owned, often provide more personalized service and community accountability.

If you experience problems with any bank, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) provides a complaint system that holds institutions accountable. Banks face real consequences for violating consumer protection regulations.

3. Past financial mistakes

Unpaid overdraft fees, bounced checks or account mismanagement can land you on ChexSystems – a banking background check system that makes opening new accounts nearly impossible. ChexSystems records stay active for five years, effectively banning you from most traditional banks during that time.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Look for second-chance banking programs specifically designed for people with banking history issues. The Wells Fargo Clear Access Banking Account and Chime's no-ChexSystems policy provide pathways back into traditional banking. Community banks and credit unions often have more flexible policies than national banks. Many work directly with nonprofits to provide financial counseling alongside second-chance accounts.

You can check out Bankrate's guide to clearing your ChexSystems report or second-chance accounts to learn more.

4. Expensive banking fees

Nearly 35 percent of unbanked consumers avoid banks due to concerns about high fees eating into their limited funds. Ironically, avoiding banks often costs more. Check-cashing services typically charge 2 percent to 5 percent of each check, while prepaid debit cards can cost $5 to $10 monthly plus transaction fees.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Compare the true cost of banking alternatives versus fee-free bank accounts. A family cashing $2,000 in monthly paychecks pays $480 to $1,200 annually in check-cashing fees alone – enough to cover several years of banking fees, if any.

Look for online banks that compete on low fees rather than branch convenience. These institutions often offer completely fee-free banking to attract customers. Here are Bankrate's top picks for best free checking accounts.

5. Inconvenient locations and hours

Traditional bank branches often operate during standard business hours when many people are working. For those without reliable transportation or flexible schedules, visiting a bank becomes nearly impossible.

Plus, opening a bank account typically requires specific documentation, including a government-issued photo ID, Social Security number and proof of address. For some immigrants, people experiencing homelessness or those with past banking problems, gathering this documentation can be challenging or impossible.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: If you have the proper documentation but struggle to visit a brick-and-mortar bank during its operating hours, look into online banks instead. These days, even big traditional banks often have functional websites that allow you to accomplish many banking tasks. Most allow you to apply for an account online at any time of day, and some, such as Ally Bank, have 24/7 customer service.

6. Young adults who rely on digital alternatives

About 62 percent of Gen Z lacks traditional bank accounts, preferring payment apps, digital wallets and prepaid cards that may be more convenient and tech-forward. While these services work for daily transactions, they often don't provide the foundation for building credit, saving for major goals, or accessing traditional loans needed for cars, homes, or education.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Use digital banking as a bridge to traditional financial services rather than a replacement. Many digital banks now offer full FDIC protection with app-based convenience.

Risks of being unbanked or underbanked

The true cost of banking exclusion extends far beyond immediate fees – it creates a cascade of financial disadvantages that compound over time.

- You'll pay fees for alternative services such as check cashing and prepaid debit cards. Some products, such as payday loans, have outrageous interest rates that far exceed what a reputable bank or credit union would charge.
- Bank accounts provide the foundation for credit cards, loans and other credit-building tools. Without banking relationships, building the credit history needed for homeownership, business loans or emergency credit becomes nearly impossible.
- Without bank accounts, you can't access high-yield savings accounts currently earning up to about 4 percent APY. A family saving $100 monthly in cash earns nothing, while the same amount in a high-yield account generates $1,200+ annually.
- Cash savings provide no federal protection if lost or stolen, while FDIC-insured bank deposits protect up to $250,000 per account.

How to find the right bank account for your situation

Choose banking solutions based on your specific circumstances rather than accepting whatever's most convenient. Here's a decision framework:

- If you have banking history issues: Check your ChexSystems report for accuracy and consider second-chance bank accounts or credit unions. You'll need to start with a basic account to build up your profile.
- If you're concerned about fees: Calculate your current alternative banking costs and focus on finding no-minimum, no-fee account options. Consider online banks with lower overhead costs.
- If you're young or tech-forward: Look for digital banks with full FDIC protection and mobile-first banks that match your preferences.
- If you have limited income: Prioritize accounts with no minimum balance requirements. Consider online banks or credit unions.

Bottom line

Banking exclusion isn't a personal failing – it's often the result of systemic barriers that can be overcome with the right approach and resources. The key is finding financial institutions that prioritize accessibility rather than just trying to work within systems designed to exclude you.

Start with one basic account that meets your immediate needs, then gradually build toward more comprehensive banking relationships as your comfort and financial situation improve.

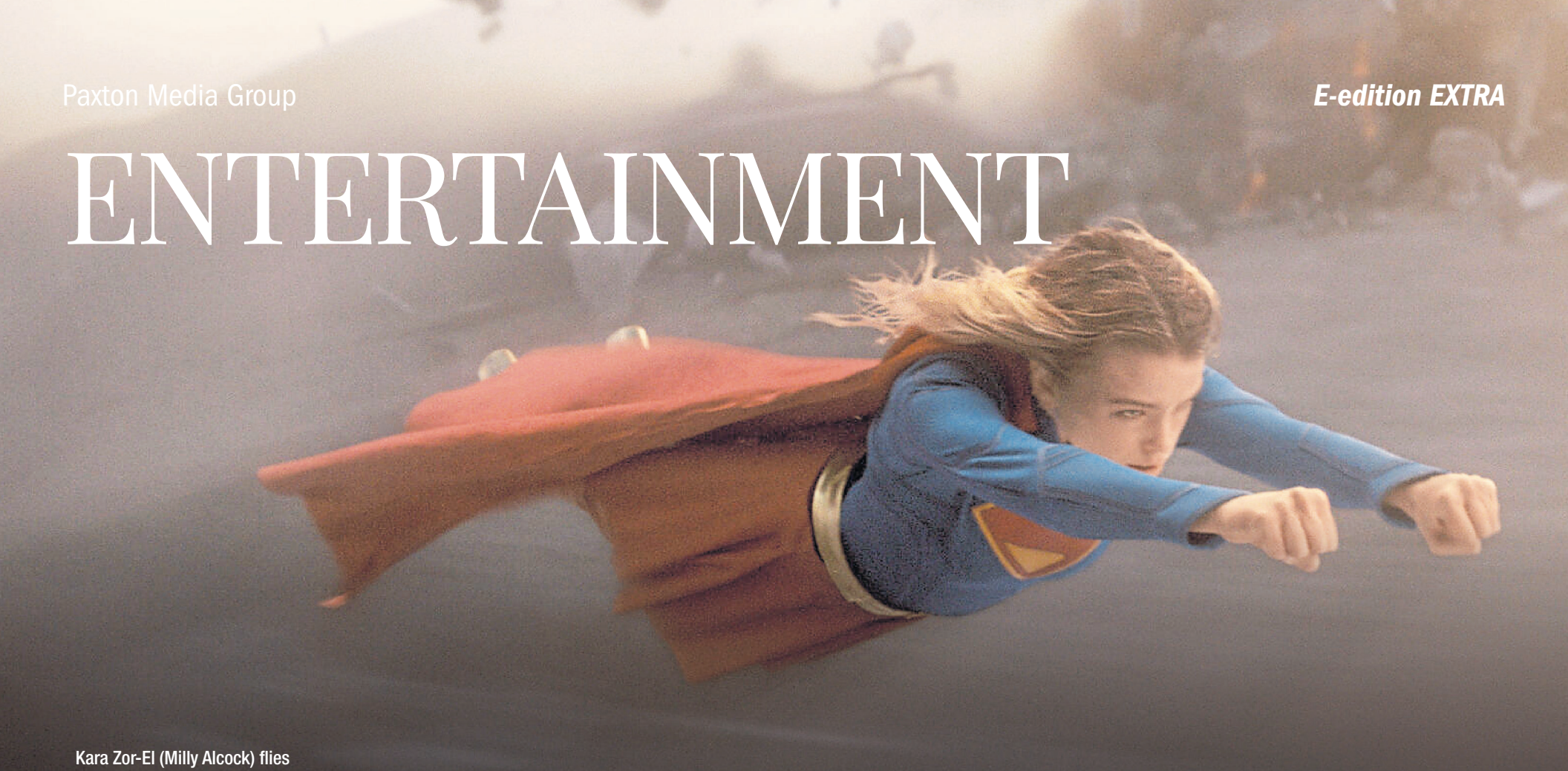
Key takeaways

- The unbanked have no relationship with traditional financial institutions, while the underbanked use banks but rely heavily on alternative financial services.
- •2 percent of U.S. households are unbanked and 14.2 percent are underbanked, according to the FDIC's 2023 survey.
- High fees, minimum balance requirements and lack of trust are the primary barriers keeping people from traditional banking.
- Simple solutions like second chance banking programs and credit union memberships can help bridge the gap to financial inclusion.

Visit Bankrate online at bankrate.com.

Paolo Boaretto / Dreamstime / TNS

ENTERTAINMENT



Kara Zor-El (Milly Alcock) flies through the air in a scene from "Supergirl."
Photos from Warner Bros. Pictures / TNS

'Supergirl' reviews

DC Studios serves up a second less-than-super movie

By MARK MESZOROS
The News-Herald (Willoughby, Ohio) (TNS)

'Supergirl'

★★

MPA rating: PG-13 (for sequences of strong violence, action, language, and smoking)

Running time: 1:47

How to watch: In theaters

James Gunn isn't exactly crushing it.

Named co-chairman and chief executive officer of the newly formed DC Studios in 2022, the "Guardians of the Galaxy" filmmaker wrote and directed the division of Warner Bros. Discovery's largely disappointing "Superman," released last year.

This week, DC Studios' second big-screen affair, "Supergirl," lands in theaters with similarly underwhelming results.

Starring Milly Alcock as the movie's namesake Kryptonian heroine – who also goes by Kara Zor-El and is the cousin of David Corenswet's Superman/Clark Kent/Kal-El – "Supergirl" isn't distractingly zany the way its 2025 sister film was. Instead, it's tonally boring, a chore of a movie chock full of thinly drawn characters and increasingly bombastic and violent.

To be clear, Gunn isn't at the helm for "Supergirl." Instead, it's the typically dependable Craig Gillespie ("I, Tonya," "Cruella"), working from a script by Ana Nogueira, making her less-than-impressive feature-writing debut.

This planet-hopping adventure in the new DC Universe isn't a complete space wreck, however, thanks largely to the spunky performance by Aussie Alcock, best known for portraying the younger Rhaenyra Targaryen in the early episodes of HBO's "House of the Dragon."

When we catch up with Kara, she's basically as we left her late in "Superman": a super-sized mess. She's out with her beloved, rambunctious dog, Krypto – the peppy and powerful pup having already been a major player in "Superman" – and enjoying a 23rd-birthday pub crawl among planets under a red sun. (Quick reminder: Supergirl, like Superman, draws her incredible powers from a yellow sun, like Earth's, so she's at least vaguely normal under a red sun and, importantly, can become intoxicated. The color of suns is a major factor throughout "Supergirl," and it's the movie's most inventive narrative element.)

It is on such a world where a drunken Kara encounters 13-year-old Ruthye Marye Knoll of the Danastia Clan (Eve Ridley), whose family has just been brutally slain by the ruthless Krem of the Yellow Hills (Matthias Schoenaerts). Understandably, Ruthye wants revenge against Krem – leader of the Brigants, a band of male pirates and traffickers – and can think of little else.

She's offering anyone who will help a sword made by her family of skilled weapons makers. The beyond-buzzed Kara isn't interested, but she gets involved when a scumbag type tries to take the sword. She continues to do her best to fend off Ruthye's subsequent pleas for assistance in her quest to kill Krem, but when the baddie – in the process of stealing her floating RV of a spaceship – shoots a charging Krypto with a poison dart, Kara has designs on punishing him, too. In fact, she needs to retrieve the specific antidote Krem carries with him to save her four-legged bud.

Milly Alcock, left, as Kara Zor-El and Eve Ridley as Ruthye in a scene from "Supergirl."

And so the gals are off to other worlds, initially traveling via the space equivalent of a beat-up Greyhound bus, on which they run into a trio of pillaging Sklarian Raiders. The sequence in which Kara retrieves stolen possessions and extracts information from them is as zany as "Supergirl" gets.

As their trek through the stars warps on, Kara and Ruthye encounter Lobo (Jason Momoa, seemingly leaving his Aquaman character back in the defunct DC Extended Universe), a rough-and-tumble, motorcycle-riding bounty hunter. They team up – sort of, eventually – but their alliance of convenience is one of the flick's myriad plot threads that fail to tie into a sturdy knot.

The screenplay by Nogueira – an actor who's penned a pair of plays – attempts to explore why Kara is so jaded by taking us back to her childhood in the Kryptonian city Argo, protected by her father's tech after the planet's demise. Of course, that protection proved to be temporary, or she wouldn't have eventually been sent to Earth like her cousin before her. It's lukewarm fare, with Kara eventually learning the familiar Spider-Man lesson – with great power comes great responsibility.

Gillespie adds a few nice touches from the director's chair throughout the movie, but they're too little to elevate the proceedings.

Again, Alcock – whose credits also include the recent Netflix limited series "Sirens" – does what she can with the material. It's a demanding role, as she is onscreen for most of the movie, and is spirited in it.

Unfortunately, the lesser-known Ridley – making her feature debut following a few television appearances – is given even less to work with. We never learn much about the one-note Ruthye beyond that her family was killed in her presence and that she is really upset about it.

If you're expecting the always-lively Momoa to save the day, he brings his larger-than-life presence to Lobo, but the demon-like figure isn't very interesting. A mix between Aquaman and his Khal Drogo from "Game of Thrones," the longtime DC Comics character isn't anything you wouldn't expect here.

If there's another bright spot in the cast, it's Schoenaerts ("Rust and Bone," "The Old Guard"), who brings a touch of nuance to the villainous Krem. You may have expected a bigger name to play the big bad in this second DC Universe big-screen effort, but some of the acting choices the Belgian makes keep things vaguely engaging when he's within the frame.

Sadly, vaguely engaging is the best "Supergirl" can manage.

We'll see if Gunn can turn things around, starting with the HBO series "Lanterns" in August and the horror-tinged film "Clayface" in October, before he returns to direct Corenswet, Alcock and the rest of the "Superman" gang in "Man of Tomorrow," arriving a little more than a year from now.

We're hoping for super results, but, at this point, it's tough to say we're expecting them.

Milly Alcock brings her powers to gritty *'Supergirl'*

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

'Supergirl'

★★ ½

MPA rating: PG-13 (for sequences of strong violence, action, language, and smoking)

Running time: 1:47

How to watch: In theaters

Even though it's only the second installment in James Gunn's DC Universe reboot (which kicked off with last summer's "Superman"), "Supergirl" feels retro for recent history. With indie sleaze swagger, a girly rock soundtrack and an unapologetically downbeat and gritty story, it feels like a return to the dark nights of the 2000s, when superheroes were moody, whiskey shots were flowing and grimy glam was hip. It's all conjured by director Craig Gillespie, who brought edgy style to the unapologetic bad girl bash "Cruella," starring Emma Stone.

Screenwriter Ana Nogueira pens a tale that finds our girl, Kara Zor-El (Milly Alcock), in a not so super state when we first meet up with her. She's on an interplanetary pub crawl "celebrating her birthday," but really, she's drowning her grief in the bottom of a pint glass, spiraling through a perpetual hangover, isolating herself while dodging calls from her cousin Clark (David Corenswet) in Metropolis. Her only companion is her trusty pup Krypto, the last vestige of her life in Argo, a city on the doomed planet Krypton that her father (David Krumholtz) protected from destruction.

But even in her booze-soaked haze, Kara can't escape the code that her mother (Emily Beecham) gave her before dying a slow and painful death from radiation poisoning on the dying Krypton. She teaches her daughter to always be good, that being good doesn't mean you can't be tough, and you don't have to be nice, just to look out for those more vulnerable than you. When a young girl, Ruthye (Eve Ridley), turns up at Kara's bar du jour with revenge on her mind, Kara doesn't want to get involved, but she can't help but protect Ruthye from the exploitative, bullying bandits in that particular dive.

Kara spends her time in some pretty weird corners of the universe, and every one of her haunts seem to be populated entirely by space creatures from the "Star Wars" cantina, a variety of bandits, outlaws, pirates and human traffickers. The worst of the worst are a brutal gang of "Mad Max"-inspired Viking bikers, the Brigands, led by Krem (Matthias Schoenaerts doing his best Bane impression), who sports ball-bearings in his face. They're responsible for Ruthye's vengeance quest and imperiling Krypto, plus they've been kidnapping young "brides" for their all-male society, Immortan Joe style. These are seriously bad dudes, and Nogueira's script doesn't at all shy away from the threat of sexual violence.

That particular storyline lends to the space Western vibe that Gillespie cultivates here, with Kara, aka Supergirl, playing the washed-up fighter who steps into action in order to save a young innocent. She's assisted by interstellar mercenary and all-around hardcore badass Lobo (Jason Momoa, returning to the DC Universe, but not as Aquaman), who rides in on a heavy metal riff with his flaming chopper and ubiquitous stogie. Even his presence feels very mid-aughts in a way, as a character that Nicolas Cage would have played in 2009, or a refugee from "Punisher: War Zone."

The conflict on these minor outlying planets is kind of fascinating, and the design is well-conceived, even if the execution, with too much CGI and bland digital backgrounds, aren't always visually compelling. The rhythm and pace of "Supergirl" can sometimes feel off, never settling into a groove, and the self-contained story feels a bit minor, a random side quest in this vast universe of characters.

What holds it altogether is Alcock's performance. Known for her breakout role as young Rhaenyra in "House of the Dragon," she brings the requisite toughness to this new, not-so-spit-shiny version of the character. Our Kara sports a wild blond mop, vintage tee, ratty trench coat and boots for most of the movie, though when she finally dons the red-and-blue suit, she does so with pride. "Supergirl" is her journey back to herself, back to the values instilled in her by her parents, carrying their "souls unfolding into the future" as her father described to her while sending her to Earth in her escape pod.

This origin story doesn't start at the beginning, but we learn Kara's story in flashback. The strongest scenes aren't when she's battling bad guys in a motorcycle wagon circle from hell, but the quiet ones when Alcock delivers the story of Kara's loss and grief, the pain she's masking with alcohol and isolation.

This is a new version of the character that's more "Rebel Girl" than "Supergirl," with a distinctly mid-aughts flavor. With Kara's melancholy monologues and musical taste, there's really only one way to label her: emo girl. Some of it works and some of it doesn't, but what works here is Alcock, and all that matters is that we find some inspiration in the girl at hand, even if being good means being a little bit bad.

Terrence Antonio James / Chicago Tribune / TNS

The exterior of Mr. Beef at 666 N. Orleans St. in Chicago on May 20.

'The Bear' was a love letter to Chicago

For the final season, here's every local restaurant that was featured

By ZAREEN SYED
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

CHICAGO — Though "The Bear," an intensely popular TV show on FX/Hulu, is ending with its fifth and final chapter airing June 25, fans can find solace in the fact that it was largely driven by real-life places and people that exist beyond the series finale. Chicagoland is both the backdrop and the heart of the show, which first premiered in 2022, and there are glimpses of the city's food, flavors and traditions in every episode – Pequod's pan-style pie, hot dogs on Maxwell Street, factory workers making Kasia's pierogies, an ice cream sundae in a clamshell bowl at Margie's Candies. Some restaurants are front and center, while others cameo for a few seconds in a montage. One might argue, however, that the montages are some of the show's best work.

Here are the real-life places that have been featured on all seasons of "The Bear."

Terrence Antonio James / Chicago Tribune / TNS

An Italian beef sandwich with hot giardiniera, sweet peppers and dipped in juice from the beef at the restaurant Mr. Beef, 666 N. Orleans St. in Chicago on May 20.

The focal point

Mr. Beef on Orleans

The legendary River North institution directly inspired "The Bear" and served as the exterior for the show's beef stand, named the Original Beef of Chicagoland. It's where Carmen "Carmy" Berzatto, played by Jeremy Allen White, returns after a run at several high-caliber Michelin star kitchens to help his family's crumbling business after his brother's death. The pilot episode was filmed on location inside Mr. Beef's actual dining room and kitchen. (666 N. Orleans St.)

Fine Dining

Ever

The kitchen of the two-Michelin-starred West Loop restaurant, led by real-life chef Curtis Duffy, was used for the iconic Season 2 episode "Forks." Richie, played by Ebon Moss-Bachrach, stages at Ever, which transforms him from a directionless staffer at The Bear into a passionate front-of-house personality.

In the Season 3 finale titled "Forever," the funeral dinner celebrating Ever showcased a star-studded gathering of real-world celebrity chefs playing themselves, including some Chicago heavyweights: Grant Achatz of two-Michelin-starred Alinea; Anna Posey, co-owner and executive pastry chef of Michelin-starred Elske; Rosio Sánchez, a Chicago-born Noma alum who runs Hija de Sánchez in Copenhagen; Genie Kwon, the James Beard award-winning pastry chef from two-Michelin-starred Kasama and Kevin Boehm, co-founder of Boka Restaurant Group. (1340 W. Fulton St.)

After

Ever's next-door sister bar was used as the fictionalized, unnamed Copenhagen kitchen where Marcus, played by Lionel Boyce, trains under pastry chef Luca, played by Will Poulter, in Season 2, Episode 4, titled "Honeydew." (1338 W. Fulton St.)

Giant

In the show, Logan Square's Giant became the fictional Verdana French Bistro, where Sydney goes to get advice and mentorship. The chefs in the background are real-life chefs at Giant. (3209 W. Armitage Ave.)

Alpana

Restaurateur Alpana Singh made a cameo at her own Gold Coast restaurant, Alpana, in a Season 4 episode, where Sweeps, played by Chicago-native Corey Hendrix, learns the basics of being a sommelier. (831 N. State St.)

Elske

Sydney Adamu, played by Ayo Edebiri, stops at the Michelin-starred West Loop restaurant at the end of the Season 2 episode, "Sundae." She asks chef and co-owner David Posey for a favor. (1350 W. Randolph St.)

Kasama

The Filipino restaurant in Ukrainian Village was featured in Sydney's breakfast tour, as she bites into the iconic and viral breakfast sandwich with a longganisa patty, a pillowy soufflé-style egg and melty American cheese on a toasted potato roll. What's not shown is Kasama's Michelin-starred tasting menu, which is a hard-to-land reservation. (1001 N. Winchester Ave.)

Avec

The Mediterranean restaurant in the West Loop appears in Season 2, when real-life Avec chef Dylan Patel briefs Sydney on the menu. (615 W. Randolph St.)

Old school

Ed Debevic's

In the fictional world, retro diner Ed Debevic's is talked about as an inspirational origin story. The restaurant's loud and snarky atmosphere inspired Carmy's father to go into the restaurant business, leading to the creation of The Beef. The original Ed Debevic's in River North opened in 1984 but closed in October 2015 to make way for a residential development. The diner reopened in 2021 at its current Streeterville location. (159 E. Ohio St.)

Ceres Cafe

In a Season 1 flashback scene, Carmy's brother Mikey, played by Jon Bernthal, begins a story saying, "So we're at Ceres, right?" The moment turns into a history lesson about the Chicago Board of Trade Building, which is marked by a statue of Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture and grain. (141 W. Jackson Blvd.)

The Green Door Tavern

The show's version of The Green Door Tavern closes down at the end of the first season, depicting a crumbling restaurant industry in River North. In real life, The Green Door Tavern still exists (steps away from Mr. Beef), serving pub food since 1921. (678 N. Orleans St.)

Lou Mitchell's

The diner in the West Loop has been serving breakfast and what it claims to be "the world's finest coffee" since 1923. It appears twice – once in a montage in Season 3, as the iconic "Lou Mitchell's" sign lights up early in the morning, then again when Marcus is standing outside the restaurant, thinking. (565 W. Jackson Blvd.)

Beef, sausage and hot dog stands

Johnnie's Beef

The Elmwood Park staple is featured in a Season 1 montage. (7500 W. North Ave., Elmwood Park)

Jim's Original

The beloved Polish sausage stand was in the Season 3 premiere montage. Jim's Original announced in May that it will leave the Maxwell Street area after 90 years and move to 551 W. 18th St. this fall to make way for a University of Illinois Chicago redevelopment. (1250 S. Union Ave., 2775 N. Elston Ave.)

Superdawg Drive-In

The original Superdawg Drive-In appears in a Season 1 montage, cementing its status as one of Chicago's legendary culinary landmarks. (6363 N. Milwaukee Ave.)

Gene & Jude's

The iconic no-ketchup hot dog stand shows up in a Season 1 montage. (2720 River Road, River Grove)

Bakeries and pastry shops

Roeser's Bakery

This Humboldt Park bakery is where Marcus finds inspiration for his donuts in Season 1, Episode 7, titled "Review." (3216 W. North Ave.)

Firecakes Donuts

Firecakes Donuts was featured in the Season 3 premiere montage. (several locations)

Margie's Candies

Sydney's Season 2 food tour stopped for a sundae at the legendary Margie's Candies, which has been in the city for over 100 years. (1960 N. Western Ave.; 1813 W. Montrose Ave.)

Chiu Quon Bakery

Chinatown's oldest and most renowned bakery pops up in a montage in Season 3. While the bakery is known for its pork buns, there are a number of delectable pastries customers swoon over, like the egg custard tart, coconut cream puff or the crystal mochi with red bean. (2253 S. Wentworth Ave.

Loaf Lounge

Loaf Lounge is the birthplace of the iconic chocolate cake that Marcus tirelessly perfects over Season 1 episodes 4 and 7. The Bear Chocolate Cake is served daily by the slice at the cafe for $8, and customers can also order a full cake for $92.15 on Loaf Lounge's website. The bakery requires at least two days notice for orders. (2934 N. Milwaukee Ave.)

Cafes

Damn Fine Coffee Bar

In Season 2, Sydney placed a "Line Cook Needed" sign on the Logan Square coffee shop's bulletin board. (3317 W. Armitage Ave)

Cafe Tola

Also in Season 3's premiere montage, Cafe Tola is known for its combination of traditional and innovative empanadas stuffed with fillings of Buffalo chicken, vegan coconut curry, PB&J, chicken salsa verde, guava and cheese and more. (multiple locations)

Doma Cafe

Doma Cafe's back patio was used in Season 3, when Sydney was mulling over leaving The Bear to work at the fictionalized version of Ever. (946 N. Orleans St.)

Metric Coffee

As of Season 4, The Bear restaurant serves coffee using Metric coffee beans. (2021 W. Fulton St.)

Milli by Metric

Before Milli by Metric officially opened in Avondale, "The Bear" offered a peek into the all-day cafe in Season 4 when the cafe was used as a set for chef Adam's (played by Adam Shapiro) upcoming restaurant. (3110 N. Kedzie Ave.)

Pizza

Pequod's Pizza

In the Season 2 episode "Forks," Richie overhears a family at a nearby table saying that they've never had deep-dish pizza before. He sets out to make a magical hospitality moment and runs out to get one from Pequod's. The chefs at the fictional Ever use a cookie cutter and micro basil to fancy up the pizza before Richie surprises the table. (2207 N. Clybourn Ave.; 8520 Fernald Ave., Morton Grove)

Pizza Lobo

In a snippet of Sydney's food tour in Season 2, she walks up to Pizza Lobo's service window to grab a slice of their signature New York-style, thin-crust pepperoni pizza. (multiple locations)

Markets and shops

88 Marketplace

The biggest Asian supermarket in Chicago was spotted during a Season 2 tour around the city when chef Sydney, played by Ayo Ediribi, looked for menu inspiration. (2105 S. Jefferson St.)

Publican Quality Meats

Sydney stops here during her Season 2 food tour and gets a butcher lesson from the butcher shop's Rob Levitt. (825 W. Fulton Market)

Paulina Market

This Lakeview butcher shop, which has been slinging deli sandwiches since 1949, appears in a montage in the Season 3 premiere. (3501 N. Lincoln Ave.)

Sabina's Food Products Inc.

In Season 3, Tina stops by the tortilleria in Pilsen, which has been making corn tortillas since 1977. (1509 W. 18th St.)

Tortello

Dario Monni and Jill Gray, the husband-and-wife co-owners of Tortello, make a brief appearance in Season 3. (1746 W. Division St.)

Alexander's Restaurant

The Greek diner in Edgewater also shows up in the montage at the beginning of Season 3's premiere episode. (4357 N. Western Ave.)

Birrieria Zaragoza

The family-owned casual Mexican restaurant, which serves birria tacos and goat dishes, scored a spot in the Season 3 montage, too. (4800 N. Broadway)

Delis

Kasia's Deli

The pierogi from this Ukrainian Village Polish deli appeared in Sydney's food tour montage in Season 2. (2101 W. Chicago Ave.)

Schneider Deli

The Jewish-style deli, which is famous for its pastrami, corned beef and latkes, was featured in the fast-paced Season 3, Episode 1 montage. (600 N. LaSalle St.; 1733 N. Halsted St.)

Trogo Kitchen & Market

In addition to the scenes filmed at Mr. Beef, "The Bear" pilot was filmed in the kitchen at Trogo Kitchen & Market with chef Rick Spiros creating the slow-roasted beef with Italian spices as seen on the episode. (2545 W. Diversey Ave.)

Bars

Alice's Lounge

Alice's Lounge, a late-night dive bar in Avondale, hosts karaoke every night. It's where Tina, played by Liza Colón-Zayas, sang Freddy Fender's "Before the Next Teardrop Falls" in the pivotal fifth episode of Season 2, titled "Pop." (3556 W. Belmont Ave.)

Other cameos and brief mentions

Michael Jordan's Steak House, Potash Markets, Olivia's Market, Lao Peng You, D'Amato's Bakery, Paulina Market, Vienna Beef Factory Store, Jetro/Restaurant Depot, The Joinery, J&M Tap, Kasia's Deli, Xurro, The Exchange, Original Pancake House

MOVIE REVIEW

Paramount Pictures / ZUMA Press / TNS

Chris Pontius, left, and Johnny Knoxville in "Jackass: Best and Last."

'Jackass: Best and Last' celebrates a quarter century of friendship, stunts

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

When it comes to "Jackass: Best and Last," the title doesn't lie. It is, in fact, the last "Jackass" movie – confirmed, while sitting in an electric chair, by ubiquitous big brother/ringleader/co-creator Johnny Knoxville, who has been at this since 2000, when "Jackass" was merely an MTV curio. It is also, in my heart, the best "Jackass" movie, because it best expresses the true meaning of "Jackass," which is, of course, friendship. Friendship, and doing ill-advised things with butts.

It is slightly tamer than its predecessors, because our dudes are older now, a bit battered, having accumulated too many head injuries and herniated discs to keep upping the ante the way they usually do. It's a sweeter film, more emotional and deeply wistful. However, that doesn't mean "Best and Last" skimps on the derring-do, or the daring doo – rectal-related stunts abound, as expected.

But it's ultimately a look back on the last 25 years, and director Jeff Tremaine opens up the vaults to share the sketches, pranks and stunts that never made it to screen, mostly because they were too edgy for TV. He opens with the bit that birthed "Jackass" in 1998, involving Knoxville in the desert with a pistol and a Kevlar vest. "Best and Last" blends new material with greatest hits, and these jaw-dropping, never-before-seen gems involve huge movie stars, run-ins with the law and a stunning performance from Knoxville's elderly alter ego Irving Zisman. They were holding out on us, but Tremaine has deployed it at the exact right moment.

"Jackass" means a lot to its fans because of the time we've spent with the franchise over the past 26 years, and the time that this crew has spent together, getting older, grayer, but hopefully none the wiser. Time is the essence of the reflective "Best and Last." Getting older is a gift, a message made especially poignant through clips featuring original cast member Ryan Dunn, who died in a car accident in 2011 at age 34. But aging is also an opportunity for new kinds of outrageous bits, like when the guys chug a colonoscopy prep drink and play Twister.

'Jackass: Best and Last'

★★★★

MPA rating: R (for extremely dangerous stunts and crude material throughout, graphic nudity, pervasive language and sexual material)

Running time: 1:32

How to watch: In theaters

So much of the appeal of early "Jackass" was the sense of youthful folly and vigor; of getting knocked down and popping right back up; getting scared or hurt but then laughing at danger with all of your best friends. "Jackass" is this gleeful expression of the friendship and foolishness that comes with youth, but we've grown old with them – most of them – against all odds, accepting the change that comes with time passing. There's something so beautiful in that, and so glorious in the persistence of these crazy, self-destructive activities. It's adorable that Steve-O laments he still wants to be MVP.

If the first "Jackass" movie was an announcement that this rough-hewn skate punk digital TV show was Capital C Cinema (and it is), and "Jackass Number Two" pushed the envelope in an intense, even dark direction, and if "Jackass 3D" was a return to fun, and "Jackass: Forever" was a gleeful deconstruction/send-up of masculinity, then "Best and Last" is about the importance of maintaining friendships over the years. It may be challenging, it may involve doing some really insane, hard and even painful things (at least in this group), but ultimately, it's a worthy endeavor.

Enough sentimentality. At the end of the day, these old dogs still have the same tricks. Chris Pontius still swings his member around like no one else, Steve-O valiantly surrenders his bodily cavities for the cause, and Danger Ehren has the best horrified reactions in the game. The newer performers, like Sean "Poopies" McInerney and Zach Holmes, prove to be true "Jackass" all-stars too. Holmes fearlessly uses his form to attain new levels of physical comedy, "bawdy" humor if you will, while McInerney is the perfect kind of willing and lovable himbo that the original "Jackass" boys embodied.

But the sweetest part of the movie, and the sequence I will want to watch again and again, is the end credits – in which both Buster Keaton and Tom & Jerry are thanked, naturally. The montage is a masterful encapsulation of the best of "Jackass" over the years: bloopers, behind the scenes, recurring bits and so many laughs. The last few moments feature Johnny and Jeff in the early days, helping each other up, processing their scary moments. Sorry Steve-O, but these two are the MVPs of "Best and Last," the madmen behind it all: Johnny, the diabolical game-show host, and Jeff, and the Wizard of Oz behind the curtain. But first and foremost, they're just friends, doing sublimely stupid and profoundly silly things to make each other laugh, then picking each other up after it's all over. If that's not the meaning of life, I don't know what is.

SERIES REVIEW

'A Woman of Substance' is a visually stunning BritBox adaptation

By MOIRA MACDONALD
The Seattle Times (TNS)

Though based on a 1979 Barbara Taylor Bradford novel, the new eight-episode British series "A Woman of Substance" nonetheless feels more like "Downton Abbey" meets "Dynasty." In a good way, let me hasten to add, despite the absence of Joan Collins. If you're fond of period dramas in which women in excellent frocks hiss "I WILL RUIN ALL OF YOU" in the general direction of a posh family who has done them wrong, this just might be an enjoyable summer binge. Should you wish for more substance … well, there's always fall.

Though the great Brenda Blethyn ("Vera") has top billing here, oddly she's not in the series much. "A Woman of Substance" unfolds in two time periods: Blethyn plays Emma Harte in the 1970s, at the time of her 80th birthday; Jessica Reynolds plays her as a young woman, beginning in the years before World War I. Still in her teens when we first meet her, young Emma is a winsome Yorkshire lass working as a maid in a grand home; though mistreated by the nasty butler (whose name, I am delighted to inform you, is Murgatroyd), she has dreams of a better, bigger life.

Those dreams get derailed temporarily due to an ill-fated upstairs-downstairs liaison – but only temporarily, mind you; this young woman is made of very strong stuff. Now and then, the series jumps ahead about 60 years, where Blethyn's Emma, now an incredibly wealthy and powerful department-store mogul, is dealing with double-crossing relatives and an excess of shag carpeting.

This is the second television adaptation of "A Woman of Substance" (the first, a huge hit in 1985, featured Deborah Kerr and Jenny Seagrove), and it has no shortage of source material: The bestselling novel, which weighs in at close to 1,000 pages, is the first of seven Bradford novels documenting the lives of Emma and her various and often undeserving offspring. You sense that knowing all seven books might be useful for the 1970s segments in the series, which are all quite brief and feature a number of characters I had trouble sorting out (just how many children does Emma have, anyway?).

'A Woman of Substance'

Rating: TV-MA

How to watch: On BritBox

Sam Taylor / BritBox / TNS

Jessica Reynolds as Emma Harte in "A Woman of Substance."

Blethyn, though weighed down by some unfortunate dialogue ("What I've dedicated my life to is revenge," she announces in the first episode, as one does), is effective and movingly haunted as 80-year-old Emma, but the show isn't much interested in her; most of the screen time is spent in rural England in the very early 20th century, as young Emma begins her climb.

And that climb is, for the most part, pretty mesmerizing. Reynolds ("Outlander," "House of Guinness") conveys nerves of steel in Emma's soft voice and resolute posture, and the aristocratic Fairley family is clearly no match for her. Unlike "Downton Abbey," where the rich people are for the most part well-meaning, here things are quite black and white: The Fairley men, consisting of squire Adam (Emmett J. Scanlan) and his sons Gerald (Harry Cadby) and Edwin (Ewan Horrocks), are all combinations, in varying degrees, of evil and cluelessness.

Meanwhile, the Fairley women are either deeply troubled (Adam's wife Adele, played by Leanne Best, rarely leaves her room, though I can't blame her as the wallpaper is breathtaking) or possessed of extremely poor judgment (Adele's hapless sister Olivia, played by Lydia Leonard, who is for some reason obsessed with evil Adam). What follows is much shrieking, drinking, scheming, burning rage, impassioned pronouncements, weirdly easy childbirth, casual fashion announcements (Lycra, we're told by somebody in the '70s, is "the next big thing") and a denouement in which young Emma, just before going into final battle, expertly pushes up the black veil of her smart little hat as if it's armor. Revenge, here, is quite well-accessorized.

All of this plays out against the gorgeous backdrop of the Fairley ancestral home (played by Broughton Hall in north Yorkshire) and a glorious assortment of lavish costumes. "A Woman of Substance" looks like money was spent not on big names in the cast, but on making every frame look stunning.

And while it veers from the book in a number of key plot points (not least its very "Dynasty" ending, entirely different from Bradford's and yet irresistibly pointing to another season), it's an enjoyably soapy wallow that will remind you of other and maybe better shows, but nonetheless keep you watching. If Emma can do all of this in just one season, just think what she can do with the next.

TECHNOLOGY

GADGETS

Go stargazing with this smart telescope

DWARFLab / TNS

DWARFLab's Dwarf mini smart telescope's lens barrel rotates up to 225 degrees, and the gimbal allows 360-degree rotation.

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

The DWARFLab's new **Dwarf mini smart telescope** is, according to the company, the world's smallest smart telescope. But don't let the size fool you; the small and portable telescope does amazing things to make the world of astrophotography accessible.

I've never dabbled in the world of astronomy, so I thought I'd play around with this for an hour or so and move on to something else. That was far from the case. After days of use (actually nights), I wouldn't say I was addicted, but it was surely a ton of fun.

While the compactness and portability of the 29-ounce telescope are critical, its functionality and powerful capabilities for bringing planets up close is amazing. The lens barrel rotates up to 225 degrees, and the gimbal allows 360-degree rotation.

The Dwarf mini's bottom is balanced to sit on a flat surface, and the threaded mount on the bottom attaches to a standard tripod. What brings everything together is the internal Sony MX662 sensor, producing 1080P resolution through a 150 mm f/5 telephoto lens. They list the 30mm aperture equivalent to full-frame 1,016 mm.

Often, I tout the popularity of plug-and-play devices that don't require reading instructions. The rapid setup, from unboxing to shooting, takes approximately 3 minutes and is accurate. The results from those few minutes are worth it, but there's so much more to see and do. It's rare for me, but I did go over the instructions and play through the DWARFLab app.

It captures 2-megapixel RAW images, which can be exported to a variety of photo programs, including Photoshop. There is a built-in triple filter that includes a dark-frame filter, an astro filter, and a dual narrowband filter. An external solar filter is included. Stellar Studio is built into the app and provides instant image corrections in 3 seconds, including noise reduction.

The app is the control center for operations, including a startup calibration and a user-friendly dashboard and menus. Not knowing many specifics about astronomy or how to use a device like this, the app was my teacher/tour guide. I did use Google often for terminology and other explanations, but the app was sailing the ship. Capturing content can be done in a variety of ways, including taking up to 90-second exposures, stacking the images and one-click processing.

It charges via USB-C, and a full charge of the 7000 mAh battery provides up to 4 hours of use on the go. Or connect to a power supply.

The DWARFLab site told me about the equatorial mount mode, which tracks the sky while compensating for Earth's rotation, capturing a stunning array of star fields. Another option is to set it up and go to sleep for the night, letting it capture images.

https://www.dwarflab.com/us/products/dwarf-mini-smart-telescope $399.00

Sennheiser's RS 275 TV headphones offer 3D sound from 37 mm diameter speakers.

Sennheiser / TNS

Does someone in your household watch a lot of sports on TV with the volume cranked up? Or do they have hearing impairments and need the TV turned up louder than others find comfortable? What about a couple sleeping in the same bed, where one wants to watch TV, and the other wants the room to be silent to sleep? In any of these situations, the **Sennheiser RS 275 TV headphones** are the solution.

Setting up the 6.9-ounce over-the-head headphones is simple, though it depends on your TV and its output options. First, turn on the TV. Then Sennheiser recommends connecting the transmitter to the optical audio output, which many people might not be familiar with. Just look at your TV; it's there, assuming your TV is somewhat modern. If not, you can use the included analog cable or purchase an HDMI cable.

Once you're set up, what's important is that the sound from the 37 mm diameter speakers is crystal clear from the lowest to the highest volume levels. I've used similar devices for TV listening, and even a fraction of a second delay between the words being spoken and the movement of the subject's mouth can be distracting. The Sennheiser RS 275 TV headphones had no delay at all when tested with a variety of connection options. Everything was synced perfectly.

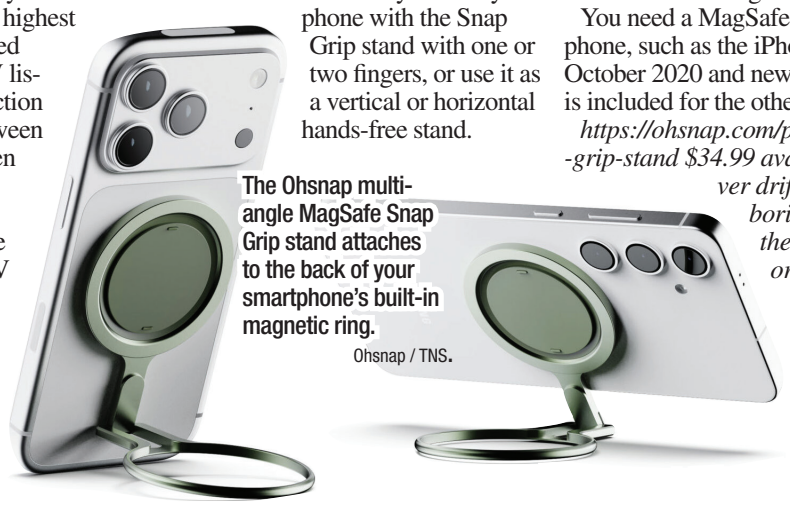
Add the Sennheiser Smart Control Plus app so you can use features to customize the transmitter and the sound sent to the headphones. The headphones have up to 50 hours of battery life, requiring only a 2-hour charge. And it's worth nothing that Sennheiser has made the RS 275 headphones with a user-replaceable battery.

They have a range of up to 150 feet from the TV-connected transmitter, and can be connected via Bluetooth for listening from a smartphone, gaming console or tablet. Multiple headsets can be connected, with each offering independent volume and feature settings. With the headset in use, the TV's speakers can also be playing.

https://us.sennheiser-hearing.com/products/rs-275 $299.95

The new **Ohsnap multi-angle MagSafe Snap Grip stand** is promoted right on the front of the box as "the phone grip that doesn't suck," and I agree.

Magnetically, it attaches to the back of your smartphone's built-in magnetic ring, which enables it to align perfectly. Once attached to the phone or a supported case, the all-in-one device lets you hold your phone with the Snap Grip stand with one or two fingers, or use it as a vertical or horizontal hands-free stand.



The Ohsnap multi-angle MagSafe Snap Grip stand attaches to the back of your smartphone's built-in magnetic ring.

Ohsnap / TNS.

If it takes you five seconds to get this 350-degree adjustable stand attached and working, it took four seconds too long. It's that easy, but incredibly functional. And what makes it stand out from other similar MagSafe accessories is its ultra-thin profile, measuring less than 1/8 inch. This lets it sit nearly flush with your phone and not be bothersome when it's being put in or out of a pocket.

The dual MagSafe design allows for another MagSafe accessory to be mounted right on the Snap Grip stand. Or mount it along with your smartphone to a magnetic surface, such as workout equipment, a file cabinet or the refrigerator.

You need a MagSafe-compatible phone, such as the iPhone 12 from October 2020 and newer. An adapter is included for the others.

https://ohsnap.com/products/snap-grip-stand $34.99 available in silver drift, gator fade, boring black, and the new blueish orchid slap

Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @gregg ellman.

TECH REVIEW

Let the robots take over ... your lawn care

The Navimow i215 Lidar lawnmower from Segway.

Jim Rossman / TNS

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

My last review was a robot vacuum. This week, we let the robots outside to let it cut the grass.

Years ago, my first experience with robot mowers required a wire to be buried around the perimeter of the yard. When the manufacturer offered to come have a wire buried at my house for testing, it was more than I wanted to deal with, as I'm a renter.

A few years later, I tried out a robot mower called the Blade, from power station manufacturer EcoFlow. It used GPS to map out the yard, and it did a decent job. Unfortunately, setup and mowing was harder than it should have been, and they stopped making and selling the mower after about a year.

This year, I've been testing the latest in robot mowing from Segway, the company most people know for mobility scooters. The company makes a few different mower models for different sized yards and different terrains.

I've been testing the Segway Navimow i215 Lidar ($1,599, navimow.com), a rear-wheel-drive model that relies on Lidar and cameras for very accurate navigation, even at night.

Features

The i215 mows without wires, and there is no external GPS antenna. The Lidar and cameras capture a detailed map of your yard and once you set it up, mowing is as simple as pressing a button. The system scans up to 200,000 points per second to build a very detailed picture of your yard.

The mower can automatically map a simple yard by itself, but it really shines when you take the time to show it around first.

It uses a single blade platter that houses six small razor blades to cut the grass.

The cutting width is just 8.66 inches, so it makes a lot of trips back and forth to mow your yard.

The mower is designed to cut a yard up to 0.37 acres. There are different models with larger batteries to mow larger yards.

It operates at just 59 decibels (very quiet), and the whole thing is IP66 water resistant, which means it is dust-tight and can handle powerful water jet sprays from any direction.

I've had it sitting in my back yard for a month and it's been exposed to heavy rain at least half a dozen times, and it performs like a champ. The mower lives on a charging pad when it's not in use. Segway sells a small cover for the charging pad that looks like a tiny carport, but I didn't get one to test. The i215 didn't seem to mind the weather at all.

It takes just over two hours to charge and it can mow for about 160 minutes before it returns to the base for recharging.

It works in conjunction with an app on your phone that helps you map and customize your mow zones. It lets you set the mowing parameters like the blade height (0.8 inches to 4 inches) and set schedules for automatic mowing.

Setup

You'll need to select a good spot for the charging base with about 12 inches of clearance on either side. I have ours in a portion of a flower bed that's open to the yard. It'll need to be within reach of electricity, so it may be necessary to run an extension cord to the closest outdoor outlet.

Once the base is placed and plugged in, you sink the provided screw/spikes to secure it and set the mower on it to charge up the battery.

The mower is smart enough to return to the charger during the mowing sessions if the battery gets low. It will recharge and then continue with the task.

Once the mower is charged, you open the app and follow the directions to connect it to your Wi-Fi network and begin to create a map of where you'd like it to mow.

You can ask it to auto map, or you can create a map manually by driving the mower with controls that appear on the phone screen. You steer it around the perimeter of your yard until you get back to the starting point. This is called mapping a zone. You can map multiple zones (like front yard and back yard) and you can show the mower the path you'd like it to take to move between the zones. It will follow your route exactly.

If there's a gate or fence separating the zones, you can either arrange to open the gate, use an optional automated "doggie door" you mount in your fence or you can pick it up and carry the mower to the other zone (called an isolated zone).

The mower weighs 32 pounds and has a carrying handle on the front to make it not so bad to tote around.

In use

The beauty of a robot mower is setting it to work on a schedule.

You don't want the robot to mow really tall grass, as the razor blades work best in just taking a little off the top, so I did one last mow with my push mower and then set the i215 to mow every few days. Once you get the yard mapped, you can set the mower to run at any time, even the middle of the night. It is so quiet, your neighbors will have no idea when it is working.

I've learned to wait until the morning dew is dried off the grass, as wet clippings will stick to the mower.

The Segway mowers work great, but they won't exactly end your yard-work commitment.

Because the blade is under the middle of the mower, they can't cut out to the edge, so there's always a small swath of uncut grass that it will leave, like up next to raised beds or retaining walls or along the curb. So, while the i215 does a great job on the lawn, you'll still need to go over the edges with a string trimmer or edger.

With the right yard, the Navimow i215 Lidar can cut your yardwork time down considerably.

This is one of those gadgets that makes me smile every time I see it working. This is what we were promised when we watched cartoons like "The Jetsons."

The future is here and it wants to help you mow.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.

SOUND ADVICE

Get smart in the kitchen with *Breville waffle maker*

By DON LINDICH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Q: When I saw your article about the Wirsh espresso machine I was going to write and suggest you look at Breville, as we have a Bambino and love the espresso it makes. I was delighted when a few weeks later you reviewed a Breville espresso maker! You really should try out their smart waffle maker, too. I have one, and it makes the best waffles.

– K.R., Milwaukee

A: I recently hinted I was testing a bunch of waffle makers, and this is the message that kicked it off. I absolutely love waffles and make them often, either at home or in hotels when I travel. Among my very many cooking gadgets is a pristine Sunbeam W-2 waffle maker. The W-2 was made from the mid-1940s to mid-1950s and sold for $20, the equivalent of over $285 today. The W-2 is legendary and still sought after by waffle aficionados, who love the cooking speed and delicious waffles it makes, especially when using the original, quite complicated Sunbeam recipe. I also have a Cuisinart Belgian waffle maker but it definitely lacks something compared to the Sunbeam. This, as well as your message, led me to the Breville Smart Waffle Pro.

The Breville Smart Waffle Pro makes four square waffles at a time and is even heavier and more solid than the vintage Sunbeam, which is saying a lot. It sells for $299.95, practically identical to the inflation-adjusted Sunbeam price. It was the perfect place to start my testing.

The Smart Waffle Pro effortlessly took my waffle making to the next level. The extremely even heating, precise temperature control and heavy-duty nonstick grates make it a waffle-making superstar. When I first served waffles from it everyone immediately noticed the difference and raved about them. Like the Breville espresso machine, you can crank them out over and over and the end results are always just right, which helped when I made and froze a huge bunch of waffles for a sick friend.

The consistency and smart features made it easy, and I didn't throw out a single waffle. It has a clear illuminated display for setting the type of waffle and the darkness, and it beeps when preheated and when the waffles are ready. There is a very large trough around the grates that captures batter overflow and cooks it so it can be removed easily. Between the quality of the end product and completely satisfying user experience, it is one of the best, and now most frequently used, cooking devices I own. I'll have some more affordable waffle makers in the weeks to come, but if you have the budget for the four-waffle Smart Waffle Pro (or its two-waffle sibling) your search stops here. breville.com

Q: I might buy the EarFun Clip 2 earbuds you wrote about. I have small ear canals and need an over-the-ear type of earbuds. That's why I bought the Sbode wireless earbuds in 2018. The battery now only lasts four to five hours, so I'm tempted to buy new ones.

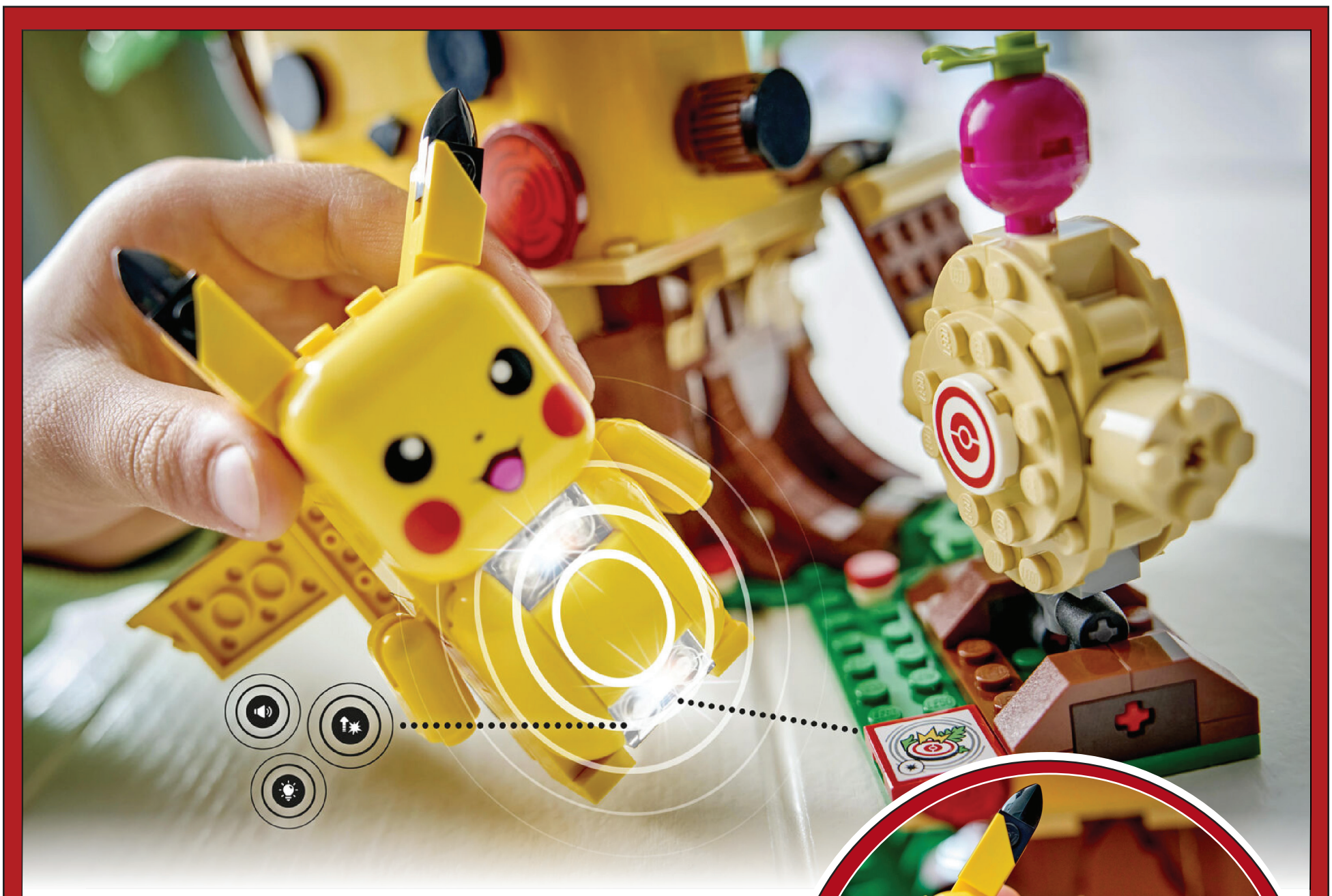
– T.E., Milwaukee

A: If you have small ear canals the EarFun Clip 2 will be even more appropriate and comfortable for you, and you get an amazing 40 hours of battery life with the case charger. I have started receiving emails from readers who purchased the Clip 2, and so far it is all raves. If you are truly tempted, please note the $30 discount code CLIP30 on myearfun.com (reducing them from $79.99 to $49.99) expires in July. EarFun typically has some kind of sale, but the $30 off is an introductory offer not likely to be repeated.

Contact Don Lindich at www.soundadvicenews.com and use the "submit question" link on that site.

Breville Smart Waffle Pro.

Breville / TNS



ABOVE: A Lego version of Pikachu incorporates a Smart Brick in this illustration. It's part of the Smart Play: Training House Pikachu set.

RIGHT: The 12 new Lego Pokemon sets will feature Smart Brick integration, but two sets will have them included.

Photos by Lego / TNS

Five new Pokemon Lego sets worth picking up on Aug. 1

By GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News (TNS)

Lego and The Pokemon Company have launched their long-awaited collaboration just in time for the franchise's 30th anniversary. The initial sets were aimed at older fans with some price tags to match. They're complex builds that were meant to be display pieces.

Now, Lego is releasing 12 new sets, but these are meant for play. They also feature the company's high-tech Smart Brick. The new pieces light up, make sounds and interact with other Smart Bricks for more immersive experiences.

The Smart Bricks launched with Star Wars sets, and the reaction to the high-tech bricks have been mixed with George Lucas' universe, but it could be the right fit with these Smart Play sets.

With the upcoming products, 10 of them are compatible but don't feature the Smart Bricks while two are all-in-one sets that include the high-tech piece. That also means they're going to be more expensive.

Here are five of the more intriguing builds, which are going on sale Aug. 1 on Lego's website, Lego stores and select retailers.

Smart Play: Training House with Pikachu – If you're looking for a starting point for this new world of Lego, this is the set to get. It includes one Smart Brick, four Smart tags that interact with the brick and a charger. (The Smart Bricks run on batteries.) That's everything you need for other sets, but the big star is Pikachu, the franchise's mascot and most recognizable star.

The set is focused on aspiring trainers and the bond with the newly built Pikachu. The concept of the set is for players to nurture, feed, play and train with their electric mouse using the accessories that include Smart tags. *Price: $69.99*

Smart Play: Charizard vs. Jolteon Ultimate Battle – This set features other fan favorites, but it's more costly than the other all-in-one set. The price can be attributed to the higher 751-piece count, which is the third-highest among the collection. What makes it more worthwhile though is that it features two Smart Bricks, four Smart tags and a charger.

The Smart Play: Charizard vs. Jolteon Ultimate Battle set features two Smart Bricks.

The Smart Play: Sprigatito, Fuecoco and Quaxly Battle set features the Paldean starters and a spinning wheel.

That makes it ideal for families with several children. The Charizard and Jolteon can battle each other, so two kids can play, and they can see the wider interactions. *Price: $119.99*

Smart Play: Berry Bash with Bulbasaur and Bidoof – Those looking for the best value can find it in this set. It features two Pokemon and two Smart tags with a total piece count of 240. It's better than The Jigglypuff Concert set, which is slightly more affordable at $14.99 but only features one pocket monster.

Lego also has comparable set featuring Charmander and Geodude's Cavern Clash for the same price, but it has fewer pieces at 198. The central theme for the Bulbasaur-Bidoof set is that players can make a berry smoothie to feed to these pocket monsters. Again, these sets do not have Smart Bricks. *Price: $19.99*

Smart Play: Sprigatito, Fuecoco and Quaxly Battle – While it will cost over $70 to grab the Kanto starters, Bulbasaur, Charmander and Squirtle, across three sets, fans of the Paldean starters can grab them all for half the price.

Sprigatito, Fuecoco and Quaxly Battle all look good, and those with Smart Bricks can use them with the 313-piece set that also features three Smart tags. The gimmick for this one is a spinning wheel that helps determines battles among the three. *Price: $34.99*

Smart Play: Umbreon vs. Garchomp Championship Battle – The Pokemon Company held a vote for Pokemon of the Year in 2020, and Umbreon and Garchomp ranked in the top 10 overall. When split into regions, Umbreon topped the Pokemon for Johto and Garchomp was No. 2 in Sinnoh. It should be no surprise because these are some of the most powerful and best-designed pocket monsters in the franchise.

The two star in this 831-piece set, which also features two Smart tags. Although it's more expensive than other two-Pokemon Lego sets, the popularity of these two make it stand out. It also features a Poke Ball trophy and a giant Poke Ball. *Price: $79.99*

A Gift with Purchase: One of the perks that Lego likes to offer is an additional limited edition set for those who spend a set amount of money. For this launch, the company is releasing the Smart Play: Ditto as Squirtle: Movie Night. It will be available at its stores and website for those who spend $130. The build features Ditto that looks like Squirtle after it watched the pocket monster on a TV screen. According to Lego, the model includes a Smart tag and a slot for a separately sold Smart Brick. This will likely be a must-have for "Pokopia" fans.

"Pokemon Go" collaboration: For the release of the set, Scopely will turn Lego Stores into PokeStops and Gyms that will allow fans to unlock exclusive rewards. It sounds as htough it could act similarly to the Fendi and FRGMT collaboration a few years back. The promo runs through September, and it includes both in-game and in-store rewards.

What about if you bought a Star Wars Smart Brick? The beauty about Smart Bricks is that they're universal across franchises and sets. They will be compatible with the Pokemon sets, but parents need to update the bricks first, according to Lego. Updates are done through the Lego Smart app.

LEFT: In the Smart Play: Berry Bash with Bulbasaur and Bidoof set, players can make smoothies for the pocket monsters. **CENTER:** The Ditto resembles a Squirtle as it watches the Pokemon on TV in this Lego set that is a Gift with Purchase. **RIGHT:** The Smart Play: Umbreon vs. Garchomp Championship Battle set features two of the most popular pocket monsters.

Paxton Media Group

E-edition EXTRA

HOME & GARDEN

Mid-century modern

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Mid-century modern is back or did it ever leave? The classics are the classics because they are timeless – vintage conversation pieces that make a statement.

The period defined as mid-century modern is roughly defined as the period between the mid-1940s and early 1970s. Organic shapes, pops of bold color and natural materials such as wood helped define both form and function.

Why do these pieces remain popular? Here's a look at why some classic pieces are making a comeback.

Eames lounge chair and ottoman

Designed in 1956 by Charles and Ray Eames, the Eames lounge chair and ottoman not only defined style spanning decades, it remains one of the most recognizable lounge chair and ottoman combinations in home décor. If you have ever had the opportunity to sit in the chair, you will understand why it is so appealing. The form of the chair molds to the body and its headrest both looks good and feels good.

When styling, allow the lines and curves to speak for themselves. The wood back should be fully exposed. A simple lumbar pillow on the chair or simple wool or knit throw will suffice. Here, silent design will allow this classic piece to speak for itself.

Wishbone chair

The so called "wishbone chair" designed by Hans Wegner in 1949 has been copied and duplicated. Variations of this chair vary from chair color and seat finish, but the overall look remains the same.

The look and feel is minimal and its cutouts allow for transparency and lightness as opposed to heavy and bulky. Additionally, this chair can be both dressed up and dressed down. From dining rooms to desks, the wishbone chair is versatile.

Today the chair comes in a variety of wood finishes including black, natural oak and walnut. Seats are often seen in basic upholstery or woven rope.

Saarinen tulip dining table

The Saarinen tulip table remains one of the most popular mid-century modern dining tables in interior design. It is a true classic. Design in 1956 by Eero Saarinen, it is simply elegant and timeless, perfect for those who love modern minimalism.

Styling this mid-century modern gem should be minimal. Think of a single organic bowl filled with succulents, a long wood vase or a simple arrangement.

The elbow chair

This is one of the most versatile dining chairs associated with mid-century modern. From dining rooms to desks, the chair conveys sturdy, industrial minimal chic.

The wood that defines the chair automatically conveys sturdy construction and a hint of luxury. For those who value craftsmanship and construction, the elbow chair provides both.

The elbow chair is one of several chairs, designed by Hans Wegner. Styling should be simple, allowing the piece to speak for itself. Many designers choose to create a sense of contrast by pairing a light wood dining table with a contrasting wood dining chair.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."

Handout photos / TNS

ABOVE: A variation of Hans Wegner's elbow chair makes a classic statement in this home office. **LEFT:** A Eames lounge chair and ottoman makes a bold statement in this bedroom reading area. **TOP:** A version of the Classic Saarinen Dining Table adds minimal clean lines to this dining space.

How can homeowners make the most of their deck or porch this summer?

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

In the summer, decks and porches quickly become some of the most-used spaces around the home. Whether it's sipping coffee in the morning, hosting family cookouts or simply relaxing outdoors after a long day, these areas can feel like an extension of your living space during the summer months. But after enduring months of winter weather, rain, pollen and changing temperatures, they may need a little attention before they are ready to fully enjoy.

One of the best places to start is with a seasonal inspection and deep clean. Dirt, leaves, mildew and pollen can build up over time, leaving surfaces looking worn and sometimes creating slippery conditions. Sweeping away debris, washing surfaces and checking for signs of damage can go a long way toward refreshing the space. Homeowners with wood decks may also want to inspect for loose boards, splinters or nails that have shifted over time, while porches should be checked for peeling paint, soft spots or signs of moisture damage.

Summer is also a great time to think about protecting your investment. Depending on the material and condition of your deck, resealing or staining every few years can help preserve wood, protect against moisture and sun exposure, and extend the lifespan of the structure. Even composite decks benefit from seasonal cleaning and inspections to ensure railings, stairs and surfaces remain in good condition.

Crystal Craig / Dreamstime / TNS

A few simple updates and seasonal maintenance steps can help homeowners turn decks and porches into comfortable, functional outdoor spaces for summer.

Comfort can make a big difference in how often homeowners actually use their outdoor space. Small upgrades like outdoor rugs, weather-resistant cushions, string lights or planters can make decks and porches feel more inviting without requiring a major renovation. Shade is another worthwhile consideration during the hottest stretch of summer. Umbrellas, pergolas, awnings or even strategically placed outdoor curtains can help create a more comfortable environment during peak heat.

If entertaining is on the agenda, homeowners may want to think about functionality as well. Simple additions like extra seating, outdoor storage for cushions and supplies, or designated grilling and dining areas can make gatherings easier and help maximize the space. For smaller porches or decks, even modest updates can make the area feel more intentional and usable.

Safety should also remain top of mind, particularly for older decks. Wobbly railings, loose stairs, cracked boards or signs of wood rot should be addressed before heavy summer use. Outdoor lighting can also improve visibility and safety, especially for homeowners entertaining in the evening or navigating stairs after dark.

A deck or porch doesn't have to be large or luxurious to become a favorite gathering spot. Often, it's the small seasonal refreshes and proactive maintenance that make the biggest difference. With a little attention now, homeowners can create an outdoor space that feels comfortable, welcoming and ready to enjoy all summer long.

Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.

TRAVEL

Luxury hotels have a new VIP guest: *Your dog*

Dreamstime / TNS

By MICHELLE MASTRO
Bloomberg News (TNS)

Morgan Owens, a wellness, media and lifestyle entrepreneur, recently checked herself and her 7-year-old bichon frise, Ralph, in for a staycation to the Lytle Hotel in Cincinnati. There, they watched Netflix, and dined on room service. (Ralph enjoyed his own steak and rice.) Owens got a massage at Mitchell's Salon & Day Spa across the street, and Ralph literally touched grass in all the green spaces.

"I've been so work-focused – our generation, we've been through Covid, DEI funds were recently pulled from my business, the list goes on – so the last thing on my mind has been having a child," Owens says. The 40-year-old may be in a committed, cohabitating relationship, but when it comes down to choosing between solace and planning for kids, "I'm going to swing towards the luxury hotel." Provided Ralph can come along.

Couples known as Dinkwads – double income, no kids, with a dog – are becoming a potent force in travel (1). Forgoing kids because they don't want them or they still can't afford them despite the dual income, these couples are filling that emotional space with pets to the point of treating them like children. And hotels are stepping up to meet the modern family by providing more canine-inclusive luxury services, from gourmet dog menus to fur-baby-tailored spas.

"The U.S. is a quite hostile place for raising children. There are so few supports for families, everything from high costs of daycare to limited protection for parental leave. … The cost of everything has gone up," says Lindsay Bryan-Podvin, who's in her late 30s and a financial therapist with a weekly newsletter, Mind Body Balance. "I'm seeing more people choose to stay, or come to terms with staying, in a Dinkwad relationship."

Some 53 percent of Americans owned pets in 2025, with millennials making up the largest percentage, according to an American Pet Products Association report. Pet industry expenditures are projected to reach $165 billion this year, up from $158 billion in 2025. Per a recent Morgan Stanley survey, 34 percent of respondents from age 18 to 34 intend to get a pet – and it's this group shelling out even more cash on them.

"It's less about spoiling your dog and more about this is what I have the ability to do," says Bryan-Podvin. "People are saying, 'Yeah, I can't support a kid, but you know what I can afford? A dog and the 50 extra bucks a night to take it on vacation.'"

Shipyard Beach, a pristine stretch of South Carolina sand, was the last place I expected to spot a goldendoodle romping near the dunes, when I visited last year. Dudley Do-Right has been Sonesta Resort Hilton Head Island's beloved mascot ever since his owner, recreation manager Kathie Sendra, brought him here as a puppy in 2025. When not keeping a close eye on the treats at check-in or greeting everyone from business executives to honeymooners, Dudley is supervising the beach toy rentals. The very good boy is a very visible (and very adorable) example how dogs are being welcomed at the upper end of luxury.

Through the Pets Are Welcome at Sonesta (PAWS) program, four-legged guests are greeted at check-in with a welcome letter and treats. Rooms feature thoughtful essentials like a cozy pet bed, and the grounds feature designated walking and potty areas, as well as pet-friendly dining.

Charlie Dice, a 38-year-old Dinkwad and author of Substack Building Quiet Wealth from Erie, Pennsylvania, thinks of her dogs as her kids to the point of applying some child-rearing logic to raising her pets: "My husband and I try to have two dogs at any given time, because like with kids, we think it's good to have a sibling."

She takes their two full-grown Bernese mountain dogs everywhere, from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to the Netherlands and Norway, via commercial carriers. She has looked into semiprivate services such as Wheels Up and VistaJet, where pets don't have to go into the hold, and dedicated companies like Bark Air, which launched with $6,000 one-way transcontinental U.S. flights for dogs.

Bark just marked two years in business and has added Tokyo to international routes that include Stockholm, Athens and Berlin. It has also introduced an end-to-end pet concierge service.

For Dice, switching up her travel plans because a hotel can't accommodate dogs is a given. "We look for facilities that cater to dogs," she says. "If our dogs can't go, we would never leave them behind in a kennel."

"Getting to spend more time with them while they're here," she continues, "that's the real luxury, because they're not here as long as we are, unfortunately."

Denver's OG boutique hotel, Hotel Teatro, understands just how much dogs can shape where and how long guests stay. General manager Courtney Griffith says that's a big part of why the hotel has waived fees: "Pet fees can feel a bit transactional when you're placing this fee on someone's fur-baby."

"Ultimately, Dinkwads tend to travel more often, stay longer when they find a place they love and become highly loyal," she adds. In a recent study, 26 percent of dog owners cited dog care while traveling as the second-biggest challenge associated with ownership. (No. 1? Cleaning up after them.)

"Some people will reach out before their stay, saying they have an allergy, and we are very upfront with them about our dog-friendliness," Griffith says. "We are a dog destination. We understand if we are not the hotel for them."

Sanctuary Beach Resort in Monterey, California, renovated in 2024 as a luxury experience for guests who want to embrace all that travel has to offer – especially with their dog in tow. "I'm a SINK [single income, no kids] from NYC, and after Covid, I think everyone engaging in hustle culture realized how important it is to take a break," says Kelli Sturges, director of guest experiences and programming.

"We're a place to unplug, which in DINK culture is a really big need," she continues. "When you don't have family obligations, you have extra hours to work, so DINKs get more tech burnout."

The resort's proximity to the Bay Area and an already dog-friendly private stretch of protected sand dunes made it easy to rebrand toward Dinkwads, especially with spacious, standalone cottages that allow lots of room to roam without your dog infringing on other guests' privacy.

"None of this makes you feel beholden to someone else's life choices," Sturges says. "Sometimes guests will ask to be roomed farther away from dogs, but we see the same thing happen with guests that have kids." (One of my favorite things in Hilton Head was seeing Dudley Do-Right scurry into the sea while knowing there was more beach to escape to if I wanted to avoid the barking.)

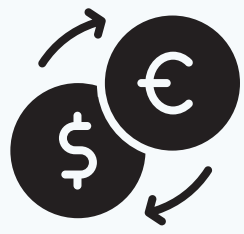
"The key to traveling with your dog is to look for a property that offers things you can do together," says Sydney Durieux, a Dinkwad in her early 50s and owner of a 5-year-old West Highland white terrier, Sir William Wallace.

She regularly takes him from New York to Kilkea Castle in County Kildare, Ireland, where all-legged guests can meander through Mullaghreelan Woods (including with a pup picnic lunch basket), take in the Wolfhound Experience (where dog guests can meet and interact with the castle's iconic enormous Irish hounds) or simply kick back at property's traditional Irish pub.

They're also a great icebreaker if meeting people is important in your travels. "People will come up to me and my dog all the time," Durieux says. "I think people are willing to be more open and friendly with you when you have a little dog jumping up to say hi to everyone. It's a great conversation starter."

For Dice, it's even more fundamental: "I like seeing the world through my dog's eyes – it's probably the same as with kids. With a new place, they get all excited."

TRAVEL TIPS



How Americans are hacking summer travel costs amid inflation

Like many Americans, I have found it harder and harder to make ends meet over the past year amid skyrocketing inflation. My grocery and energy bills have more than doubled.

Amid this reality, personal travels have largely been put on the back burner. This is especially true amid the Trump Administration's war in Iran, which has caused a global shortage of jet fuel, thus driving up airline ticket prices and putting travel further out of reach.

But a new report from Hotels.com says that many Americans are working hard to avoid canceling trips because of higher prices. Instead, Americans are changing how they shop for travel and pay for travel.

It seems American consumers are becoming "deal strategists," according to the Hotels.com report. Meaning, they're using points, perks, timing tricks, and bundled packages to stretch their travel budgets further than ever.

"Travelers may be feeling the squeeze, but they're also getting smarter," says Melanie Fish, vice president of global PR for Hotels.com. "We're seeing travelers save as much as 23 percent by booking closer in, starting stays on Sundays, or looking beyond the U.S., where 5-star hotels can offer strong value. This is a summer where how you book matters just as much as where you go."

The Hotels.com report breaks these actions down even further, identifying 5 ways in particular that Americans are "hacking" summer travel costs. Here's a closer look.

Ways Americans Are Hacking Summer Travel Costs

Filter-first travel planning: Consumers who are using travel booking platforms are increasingly relying upon "budget filters" to sort their accommodation options. Hotels.com found budget filtered searches are up more than 1,800 percent.

■ Points are becoming currency: With money being so tight this summer, Americans are looking for other ways to cover travel costs. And that has meant rewards usage has surged 820 percent as travelers actively offset trip costs

■ Visible value beats cheap rates: Free breakfast used to be a 'nice to have' extra when looking for a hotel. Not this summer. These days travelers are prioritizing cost cutting offers like free breakfast, meal plans and all-inclusive perks over the lowest advertised room rate

■ Bundling is back: There's nothing worse than spiraling, unexpected costs during the course of a vacation. To avoid that scenario, more travelers are choosing packages that lock in costs upfront this summer.

Additional cost saving tips

■ Want to save even more money on your next trip? The Hotels.com experts have provided a variety of expert tips to help make your budgeting efforts even easier.

■ Last-minute hotel bookers saved an average of 23 percent compared to travelers who booked four-plus months ahead

■ Sunday hotel check-ins are 15 percent cheaper than Friday stays in the U.S.

■ January remains the cheapest month to travel, while mid-October has become one of the most expensive periods of the year

There also happens to be a variety of locations where hotel prices are falling. That includes popular U.S. destinations such as Maui, where prices are down 27 percent; Las Vegas, where prices are down 10 percent and the outdoor lover's paradise of Park City, Utah, where prices have fallen 8 percent.

There are savings to be had internationally as well. Hotel prices in Liguria, Italy have declined 31 percent, while in Leipzig, Germany they're down 25 percent and in Hanoi, Vietnam, nightly rates have dropped 22 percent.

By Mia Taylor / TravelPulse (TNS)